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# CHRISTIAN ORIENT

A JOURNAL OF EASTERN CHURCHES FOR CREATIVE THEOLOGICAL THINKING

SEPTEMBER 2012

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## SPIRITUALITY

THE SPIRITUAL IDEALS OF THE EGYPTIAN  
AND SYRIAN MONASTIC TRADITIONS

Jaison Thundathil CSsR

THE SILENT GIANT OF MODERN

ECCLESIOLOGY: THE LEGACY OF JOHANN ADAM MÖHLER.

Justin Vettukallel MST

THE BLESSED PASSION OF HOLY LOVE

Roselin SST

BOOK REVIEWS  
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## Editorial

We are in the golden jubilee year of the great event of the Vatican II Council. In this connection the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI has opened a door of faith (*Porta Fidei*) to the Year of Faith. In his words: "The door of faith (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church" (*Porta Fidei*,1). The Year of Faith is "to rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed ever clearer light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ" (*Porta Fidei*,2). The articles in this issue of *Christian Orient* are intended to facilitate this rediscovery of the journey of faith.

In the first article Fr. Jaison Thundathil CSSR studies the desert spirituality that developed in Egypt and Syria. These monks left the society in order to ascend to a life guided by the Spirit and the Word of God. The true monastic joy is the goal of the desert Fathers and in order to attain this happiness they left the pleasures of the society and led a life in Christ. Fr. Jaison takes us on a journey through the true spirit of Eastern asceticism. While discussing the oriental basis of monastic life the author also mentions its Jewish background especially that of the Qumran community, Nazrites and the Hibtites.

The modern ecclesiological discussion of Johann Adam Möhler from the Tübingen

school is the topic of the second article by Rev. Fr. Justin Vettukallel MST. Möhler's approach to theology, the cultural, social and political influences on him, and his own dynamic, progressive and the evolving ecclesiology are dealt with in detail. Towards the end, Fr. Justin explains the influence of Möhler's ecclesiological understanding in the modern progressive theological thinking.

The true meaning of divine love has taken a real expression through the textual study on 'Centruiae de Caritate' of Maximus the confessor, by Sr. Roselin SST. We, the Christians are called to practice and experience the divine love. But it poses a real challenge before us since we cannot measure the divine. Sr. Roselin starts with an introduction to the work of Maximus the Confessor. Then the meaning of true love from the Christian perspective is well explained with emphasis on both the dimensions of love, vertical and horizontal. She concludes highlighting the need of having a purified love, an 'apatheia' to be a true Christian.

Sincere thanks to the Contributors of this issue of *Christian Orient*.

**Dr. Andrews Mekkattukunnel**

Editor

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# The Spiritual Ideals of the Egyptian and Syrian Monastic Traditions

*Jaison Thundathil CSsR*

## Introduction

The retreat to the desert and the emergence of monasticism in fourth-century Egypt is understood as one of the most significant and interesting moments of early Christianity. A vibrant and original spirituality was the result of the withdrawal from the mainstream of society and culture to the stark of solitude of the desert. It influenced widely both contemporaries and succeeding generations. Monks were able to make subtle discernment regarding the complex forces in the human soul. In their solitude, they deliberately separated themselves from their fellow human beings. As a result they were often seen and understood as aloof and forbidding. At the same time people respected them for their extraordinary depth of compassion. They audaciously battled with the demons in the desert, but humbly refused to acknowledge their own power. It was often in their silence that they were most eloquent. Many of the desert monks refused to participate in and enjoy the growing establishment of the Church under Constantine. They preferred to live on the margins of society under the direct guidance of the Spirit and the Word of God. They had a far reaching impact on contemporary society and Church and left rich and varied legacy.

The spirituality of monasticism is essentially hidden in the depth of human consciousness. It is self-evident that the very earliest period almost completely eludes us, though degree of unity within the providential borders; consequently, a logical plan of study would be one imposed by geographical boundaries rather than chronological sequence. We may not always be able to find the most essential of most valuable information, but we do possess sufficient records of facts and personalities to justify an attempt to produce a historical sketch, factual and complex. Monasticism is the creation of the Christian Egypt. Its founders were few ordinary people of the country of the Nile. They were not influenced by the Greek ideas. Its beginnings are intimately connected with the history of asceticism, which is very part of Christian teaching from the very beginning. In the early times individuals practiced asceticism without going away from home and family. But soon the representatives of the new movement retired from the world and sought silence and solitude.

At the time when the peace of Constantine took effect and the Christians started to adjust itself to the social and cultural structure of the empire. Due to this tendency there arose a movement that expressed a

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rejection of the worldly values. They were less formal and stricter in their disciplines such as celibacy, asceticism, fasting, periods of prayer, and poverty in general. It was the reputation of the Egyptian monks that caused spreading their ideas and got established throughout the Christian world. The movement was not exclusively from Egypt, because it originated in many provinces independently. However, it developed according to the Egyptian mode. Shortly before the monks appeared in Egyptian desert, there were in Syria fraternities of "sons or the daughters of the covenant". They pledged themselves at baptism to a life of celibacy, prayer, and lay ministry in villages that had been in contact with itinerant prophetic teaching. They formed the nucleus of the Christian community. The authorities supported them, while taking precautions to avoid abuses.

However there was reason that the fourth century witnessed the great development of monasticism. It was a natural reaction against the danger of secularization after the Church got freedom and Christianity was adopted as the State religion. Thus flight from the world was the counteraction to the spread of worldliness. As a result, monasticism in its early stage was opposed to learning and literature. However, this hostility did not last. As time went on, their attitude towards education and knowledge became gradually more sympathetic. It is still within the fourth century hermits and monks appear among Christian authors. Soon, they ceased to limit themselves to works mirroring the high theological and historical value. Moreover

many of the monasteries developed into outstanding centers of sacred science.

A monk is a general term for a person who leads the monastic life in a monastery. Today often it is wrongly understood that it signifies a monk living in community. This is merely one kind of monk who lives with other monks, namely a *cenobite*. From early Church times there has been a lively discussion of the meaning of the term *monk* namely whether it denotes someone living alone, away from the rest of society, or someone celibate or focused on God alone. A monastery is the dwelling place of one or more monks. In each house there is a consecrated room which is called a sanctuary. They take nothing other than laws and oracles delivered through the mouth of prophets, and hymns and anything else which fosters and perfects knowledge and piety into it. They keep the memory of God alive there.

## 1. Oriental Background of Christian Monasticism

Most of the primitive religions had its origin in the oriental part of the world. And all these religions had a monastical aspect and a group who live monastical life style. We know that monks, nuns and monasteries existed before the Christian era. They do ask the question why they exist, what the purpose of their life is and what the transcendent reality is from which they and everything else come and to which everything is moving. They want to reach this transcendent Reality. It is within this context that we should understand monastic life as practised and explained by our oriental brothers and sisters<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> T.C. Hall, "Asceticism". In *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 2, p. 63.

## 1.1 Monasticism in Jewish Tradition

In Jewish religion there were so many religious groups among them some were radical. Each group had their own theological basis and different life style. In Jewish religious tradition we desert life styles in prophet like Elijah, Hosea, John the Baptist etc. The Essenes were main desert ascetics in Jewish tradition following the Torah strictly, expecting the messiah the redeemer, weighting with the vigilance in prayer, mortification, studying the word of God. Community living, fraternal correction, obedience and fellowship were given emphasis. Therapeutes were another branch of desert ascetical living, healing for spiritual illness. End of their life was intimacy with God.

### 1.1.1. Prophets in the desert and Asceticism of Essenes

From the Old Testament we know that the prophets had their own disciples who resembled later monks. They had a special habit, a sort of tonsure and they lived in communities. The prophets had groups of young men with them. They helped the prophets in their ministry.<sup>2</sup> The Jewish Essenes also had a form of religious life. They lived in groups. The Jewish apocalyptic literature always speaks of a new world that is to come. This new world is the perfect world and people have to prepare themselves for its coming. It was therefore natural, that the Jews, who were desirous of entering into this new world, should depart from ordinary life and busy themselves with the coming new world.

They possessed everything in common. They observed their rules with great care. They believed in providence and the immortality of the soul. The Essenes could also be considered monks who lived for an other-worldly goal.

### 1.1.2. Ascetical living of Nazrites and Hibtites

Judaism does not support the monastic ideal of celibacy and poverty, but two thousand years ago taking Nazrite vows was a common feature of the religion. Nazirite Jews abstained from grape products, haircuts, and contact with the dead. They did not withdraw from general society, and they were permitted to marry and own property. In most cases a Nazirite vow was for a specified time period and not permanent.

## 1.2. Asceticism

The word asceticism comes from the Greek *askesis* which means practice, bodily exercise, and more especially, athletic training. The early Christians meant spiritual exercises performed for the purpose of acquiring the habits of virtue. The flesh is continuously lusting against the spirit, and repression and self-denial are necessary to control the animal passions. It would be an error to measure a man's virtue by the extent and character of his bodily penances. It is only a help; a disposition; a means though a fitting one, for the attainment of true perfection. Thus asceticism is an effort to attain true perfection. It should be noted also that the expression "fasting and abstinence" is commonly used in Scripture and by ascetic writers as a generic term for all sorts of penance.

<sup>2</sup> A.E. Suffrin, "Ascetism" in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol.2, p. 97.



### 1.2.1. The Natural Asceticism

It is for personal satisfaction, or self-interest, or any merely human or natural motivation, a man aims at the acquisition of the natural virtues. He has entered upon a struggle with his animal nature; and if he is to achieve any measure of success, his efforts must be continuous and protracted. Nor can he exclude the practice of penance. Indeed he will frequently inflict upon himself both bodily and mental pain. He will punish himself severely, either to atone for failures, or to harden his powers of endurance, or to strengthen himself against future failures. He will be commonly described as an ascetic, as in fact he is, for he is striving for natural perfection. The defect of this kind of asceticism is that, besides being prone to error in the acts it performs and the means it adopts, its motive is imperfect, or bad. It fails to recognize that perfection consists in the acquisition of something more than natural virtue.

### 1.2.2. Christian Asceticism

The desire to discern and do the will of God motivates a person to get involved in Christian asceticism. Any personal element of self-satisfaction as the motive will be vitiating it. It is to subordinate the lower appetites to the dictates of right reason and the will of God. It is possible by the continued and necessary cultivation of the virtues. The will of God is discoverable by human reason. It is explicitly revealed for us in the Ten Commandments. Some of these

commandments are positive and others are negative. The negative precepts imply the repression of the lower appetites, and consequently call for penance and mortification. They intend the cultivation of the virtues which are opposed to the things forbidden. This may be considered as the first step in true asceticism.

In the Christian spirituality love is extended even to one's enemies, and we are bidden to pray for, and to do good to them who revile and persecute us. This supernatural love constitutes one of the distinctive marks of Christian asceticism. Christ wants His followers to have a personal affection and a closer imitation of His life than the mere fulfilment of the Law. The motives and the manner of this imitation are there in the Gospel. That is taken as the basis by ascetical writers for their instructions. This imitation of Christ is the general Scheme of this higher order of asceticism.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.2.3. The Character of Christian Asceticism

The character of this asceticism is determined by its motive. In the first place a man may be willing to make any sacrifice rather than commit a grievous sin. This is the lowest in the spiritual life, is necessary for salvation. Again, he may be willing to make such sacrifices rather than offend God by venial sin. Lastly he may, when this no question of sin at all, is eager to do whatever will make his life in conformity with that of Christ. It is this last motive which the highest kind of

<sup>3</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, "Asceticism and the gospel of Mathew", p. 20-23

asceticism adopts. These three stages are understood by the early fathers as the three degrees of humility.

The spirit of unworldliness, of detachment from family and other ties, is not the actual performance of those things, but the serious disposition or readiness to make such sacrifices, in case God should require them. There are multitudes of men and women who though living in the world are not of it, who have no liking or taste for worldly display. They avoid worldly advancement or honour deliberately and practise penance when there are opportunities for pleasure. They love the poor and dispense alms beyond their means. They take time and withdraw from the world when it is needed for prayer and of divine things. They are behind every undertaking for the good of their fellow men. They do it for the glory of God.

#### **1.2.4. The Monastic or Religious Asceticism**

The establishment of religious orders was not a sudden event in the Church. The germs were there from the very beginning. In the Gospel we have repeated invitations to follow the evangelical counsels. In the early Church, we find that particular kind of asceticism widely practised which later developed into Religious Orders. When the Church had grown colder, there within its bosom was a drawing together of those souls who possessed of the greatest zeal and fervour. They were men and women, living in the world without cutting off themselves from the ties

and obligations of ordinary life, yet binding themselves by private vow or public profession to live in chastity all their life, to fast all the week, to spend their days in prayer.<sup>4</sup>

When Catholicism became the social religion of the world, comes the movement manifested itself. Those ascetics and virgins, who have mingled with the common body of the faithful till then, abandon the world and go forth into the wilderness. The Church of the multitude is no longer a sufficiently holy for them. They went to build in the desert the Jerusalem which they longed for. The realization of monastic institutions was a gradual one. Those who enter a religious order take the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which are a particular kind of asceticism from other forms. They are called substantial vows because they are the basis of a permanent and fixed condition or state of life, and affect, modify, determine, and direct the whole attitude of one who is bound by them in his relations to the world and to God. The virtue of prudence is a part of asceticism. The monastic asceticism is an organized effort to attain perfection. If that purpose is kept in view, the order continues to exist otherwise abolished.

#### **1.2.5. The False and True Asceticism**

False asceticism holds a wrong idea of the nature of man, of the world, of God. It begins with proposing to follow human reason, soon falls into folly and become fanatical, and sometimes unrealistic in its methods and ideas. With an exaggerated idea

<sup>4</sup> Joseph H. Fichter, *Dimensions of Authority in the Religious Life*, p. 79-80.



of the rights and powers of the individual, it rebels against all spiritual authority. It assumes a greater authority than the Church has ever claimed, leads its dupes into the widest extravagances. Its history is one of disturbance, disorder and anarchy. It has produced no good results in the acquisition of truth or the uplifting of the individual or works of benevolence or intellectual progress. In some instances it has been the instrument of moral degradation. On the contrary True asceticism comprehends clearly the true nature of man, his destiny, and his obligations. It is guided by right reason and assisted by the light of revelation. Being aware of that he has not been created in a merely natural condition, but raised to a supernatural state, it seeks to illumine his mind and strengthen his will by supernatural grace. He knows that he has to control his lower passions and withstand the assaults of the evil spirit and seductions of the world.<sup>5</sup>

In order that it practices of penance, at the same time by the virtue of prudence it prevents excess. Instead of inducing moroseness and pride it bestows on him joy and humility. It creates in him the greatest love for humanity, and cultivates that spirit of self-sacrifice which has its works of benevolence and charity which results in countless benefits on the humanity. The true asceticism is an enlightened method to observe the law of God through all the various degrees, from the faithful life of the ordinary believer to the absorbing devotion of the greatest saint.

### 1.3. The Theology of Christian Asceticism

It is offshoots of spiritual richness and fullness of early Christians. Early Christians are called the pre-descanters of Christian Sannyasies. They were leading a life of Christian fullness. That was a fellowship of saints. There was a spiritual decline and no radical way of spiritual life of the Church in the post persecution era. When the Church got freedom in the Empire Rome and Christianity became the official religion of the empire, it lost its radical spirit. Luxury, authority and worldly influences lessened the spirit of Christianity<sup>6</sup>.

#### 1.3.1 Identification with the sufferings of Christ

Martyrdom is partaking in the passion and death of Jesus Christ. Before the empire Constantine, Christianity was matter of seriousness and challenging affair. Early Christians were eager to become martyrs. Martyrdom is the identification with the sufferings of Christ. They respected the martyrs. They wanted to become the martyrs because they wanted to be identified with the passion of Christ. They loved Christ who suffered and died for them out of love for them. Even during the time persecution there were people practiced asceticism. They were aware that without practicing martyrdom in the form of asceticism they will not be able to take up the martyrdom when the actual

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Merton. *No Man is an Island*. p. 83.

<sup>6</sup> O. Zockler, "Asceticism". *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol.2, p. 73.



situation is demanding. Persecution and martyrdom ended soon. Though the intensity and the quality of Christian living got decreased there people who wanted to love the life of Martyrdom. By renouncing the likings of the body and mind and accepting austerity on themselves early Christians continued the attitude of martyrdom even after the persecution got ended.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.3.2 Radical Way of Following Christ

Asceticism is the set of disciplines practiced to work out the salvation and further the repentance and all the more the purpose of spiritual enlightenment. Ascetic practices are evident among early Christians. Scriptural examples of asceticism can be found in the life Jesus who fasted for 40 days. Jesus instructed his disciples to fast (Mt 6,16) and sell their possessions (Mt 19,21). The primitive Jewish-Christian community in Jerusalem (Acts 4,32) had a tradition of no personal ownership, as well as periods of prayer and fasting (Acts 13,2). Christian authors of late antiquity such as Origen, Jerome, John Chrysostom, and Augustine interpreted meanings of Biblical texts within a highly ascetic religious environment. Through their commentaries, they created an asceticized version of Christianity.<sup>8</sup>

Some early Christians believed that asceticism was the only true way to salvation. Though this doctrine was rejected as heretical, the ascetic life was preserved through the institution of monasticism. Sexual abstinence was only one among many aspect of ascetic

renunciation. The ancient monks and nuns had other, equally weighty concerns such as pride, humility, compassion, discernment, patience, judging others, prayer, hospitality, and almsgiving. For some early Christians, gluttony represented a greater concern than sex, and as such the reduced intake of food is also a facet of asceticism. Through all these they wanted to be identified with Christ who suffered out of love for him. They wanted to follow in an exceptional way.

### 1.3.3 The Example and Teachings of Christ

Christianity accepts asceticism as part of Christian life. Jesus was not an ascetic, if asceticism is always fasting. He knew how to enjoy a good meal. But Jesus fasted 40 days and nights. Jesus worked hard for the sake of others that are for others. He suffered hunger and thirst for the sake of God's kingdom. The patient and uncomplaining acceptance of the conditions of poverty and suffering constitutes a very noble kind of spirituality which easily develops into one of a higher kind and may be designated its third New Law, the teachings and example of Christ who, continually appeals to His followers for a closer imitation of His life. This imitation of Christ generally proceeds along three main lines, mortification of the senses, unworldliness, and detachment from family ties.

Regarding mortification, St. Paul says, "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection: lest perhaps when I have preached to others I myself should be castaway" (1Cor9, 27) and

<sup>7</sup> Thomas M. Gannon and George W. Traub. *The Desert and the City*. p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Serena Charivupurayidathil, *Religious Life as Imitation of Christ*. p. 25.



Our Lord Himself says, "He that taketh not up his cross, and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me" (Mt10, 38). About unworldliness, we have, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn18, 36). Considering detachment Jesus say that "if any man come to Me and hate not his father and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Lk14,26). Such is the general scheme of this higher order of asceticism.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.3.4 The Example of the Apostolic Community

We hear of Virgins and prophets in the Acts of the Apostles. (Act21, 8) In the writings of the Apostle we find remarks about women who were members of the first Christian communities. In the Christian communities we find different forms and patterns of the following Christ. Some decided to remain unmarried for the sake of God's kingdom. Such life is a Christian Charism and it continues to exist in the Church till today. There were also widows who received widow's garments. These people were serving Christian communities. When the number of Christians grew and all sorts of people came into the Church, then particular groups had to be formed in order to lead a more intense Christian life.

### 1.3.5 The Relevance of Asceticism

Christians don't persuade anyone to practice asceticism. In the Byzantine monastic

tonsuring service, which includes the cutting of hair, the bishop gives the scissors to the novice and says unto him: "*Take these scissors and hand it to me.*" This action is repeated three times to reveal that the decision of the novice is freely volunteered.

Asceticism emerged in the third century AD in an institutionalized form, in Egypt and Syria at the same period. Undoubtedly, it did not emerge from vacuum. There were hermits scattered here and there, and also many that were widowed did not remarry but adopted the prayer rule clinging to the Lord. But the strong movement, which appeared with St. Anthony the Great, was routed in his burly insistence of living the testimony of the Gospel, purifying himself and becoming a calling to the others. Anthony was sad upon the Church of Alexandria for its collapse from the seriousness of the New Testament. He could have, like any outward preacher, go to the flock and blame them. But what St. Anthony did instead, was that he willed to renovate himself, hoping that others may renew through this.<sup>10</sup>

When we read the ascetic literature we will discover a terrible seriousness in the training methods of rejecting passions and acquiring virtues. One will come to touch how much 'blood' if I may figuratively describe these hermits shed in order to receive spiritual benefits. He will come to know the great efforts they exerted to purify their souls from jealousy, from hatred and from all sorts of

<sup>9</sup> Serena Charivupurayidathil, *Religious Life as Imitation of Christ*, p. 22. also in J. Eapen, *Church in the Desert*, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas M. Gannon and George W. Traub. *The Desert and the City*. p.30



negligence so that be able to love all people and serve and minister unto them with an amazing humility and meekness.

#### 1.4 Monk as a Martyr

Early Christians respected martyrs and they were eager to become martyrs. There were two ways of martyrdom: red and white. Red is the realized or actualized martyrdom. White is the desired martyrdom or the readiness to shed the blood for Christ. Persecution and martyrdom ended soon. As a result the intimacy and quality of Christians living got decreased. Many of the pagan kings received the Christianity and Christian religion became the religion of the State. As a result Christianity got secularised. Compared to the early status it is considered to be a decline in intensity and love for Jesus Christ. Formerly they had to pay cost of it. Even during the time of persecution there were Christians who were living Christianity with the help of asceticism, taking the cross and following Christ. They were considered to be white martyrs and they were respected highly. Teach your body the martyrdom that consists in mortification. The importance of the martyrdom in the spirituality of the early Christians would be difficult to exaggerate. But it did not have this exceptional importance merely for the particular period. After the elements of the New Testament certainly no other factor has had more influence in constituting Christian spirituality.

##### 1.4.1. The Spirituality of Martyrdom

Although martyrdom is so characteristic of primitive Christianity, it had precedents in

Judaism (2 Mach7; Dan3). The Christian martyr, however, is distinguished not only by faith in Christ, but by the explicit connection of his death with Christ's. This quality is not only Christian, but "Christic", presupposing a special relationship with Christ. This enables us to understand the role of martyrdom in the development of eschatology. The sacrament of Eucharist replaces the Paurosia, and aspiration for martyrdom prepares the way for a substitution of "Christian death" of the individual for general resurrection. The attitude of the fathers was nothing of the pleasures of the world or the kingdom of this. It is good for me to die for Christ Jesus rather than to reign over the ends of the earth. It is my birth that is approaching.

For the martyrs desire has been crucified in them, there is no longer any ardour for what is material, but living water. They no longer take any pleasure in a food of corruption and in the pleasures of this life. It is the bread of God that they desire which is the flesh of Jesus Christ and for drink, it is His Blood that desire that is, incorruptible they love. It is not the death itself that the martyr seeks in death, it is Jesus Christ. For it is when one dies for him that one becomes his true disciple.<sup>11</sup>

##### 1.4.2. Martyrdom and the Imitation of Christ.

Martyrdom is the supreme example of imitation of Christ. We honour the martyrs as Christ's disciples and imitators. We love them because they deserve it, by reason of their incomparable love of their King and Master. The theme of imitation finds its meaning only

<sup>11</sup> Margaret R. Miles. *Fullness of Life: Historical Foundations for a New Asceticism*. p. 20.



in its fusion with the hope of attaining Christ. This is the purpose of martyrdom.

### 1.4.3. Martyrdom and Eucharist

Eucharist, in nourishing us with the risen Christ, associates us with his passion and, very particularly, with the agape which is its soul; and reciprocally, martyrdom, as realizing in our lives the perfection of agape, gives its whole realism to the union with Christus passus brought about by the Eucharist and finally reveals in us the presence of the risen Christ. In the Eucharist He has given us the seed of what He is, He has set in motion in us the process that brought Him to His risen life. In martyrdom, this process unfolds and this seed bears its fruit in suffering with Christ. Not only do we rise with Him, but we become in some way the Risen One. In His death, the martyr reveals himself as forming but one being with Christ, dead and risen again. By dying they are born to a life which is the very life of Him who died and rose again. When they die, it is hence forth he who lives in Him. The assimilation between the Eucharist and martyrdom must therefore, be understood exactly. It doesn't mean that martyrdom would be an equivalent of the Eucharist. It means that what is given obscurely in the Eucharist reveals its reality in martyrdom the presence in us of Christ dead and risen again.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.4.4. The Presence of Christ in the Martyrs

In the life of martyrs the presence of Christ appeared as an object of experience.

The Christian writers were quite convinced that at the moment when they consummated their martyrdom Christ revealed himself as conqueror of death in them as in himself. Martyrdom appeared as the greatest charismatic experience in the ancient Church. It is the confession, otherwise called martyrdom that gives the spirit of prophecy and the other gifts. When we think and speak about constellation of the various Charisms around martyrdom should not forget that it is martyrdom itself which is the supreme Charism. It is the Supreme Charism because by it we attain Christ, we attain God and also because it represents the perfection of Charity.

### 1.4.5 Martyrdom and Baptism

The martyrdom is the baptism of the blood. The relation between baptism and martyrdom takes two forms. The first concerns catechumen, that is, believers put to death for their faith before having received baptism. The church did not hesitate to consider that their martyrdom was for them the equivalent of a baptism. The second concerns the baptized. For them, martyrdom was as it were a second baptism, renewing and definitively consummating the effects of the first.<sup>13</sup> Martyrdom is a baptism which takes the place of the baptism of waters when it has not been received, and which restores it when it has been lost. We can no longer rightly reproach the martyrs with anything since in their baptism they laid down life itself. Thus it is that love covers a multitude of sins that love by which in loving God with all one's strength,

<sup>12</sup> Margaret R. Miles. *Fullness of Life: Historical Foundations for a New Asceticism*. p.34.

<sup>13</sup> L. Stephanie Cobb, *Dying To Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, p. 3.



that strength by which one struggles in martyrdom, and with all one's soul, that soul which one lays down for God, one becomes martyr.

Martyrdom is not only as substitute for baptism for those who had not received the latter. It is a second baptism for those already baptized and it is more perfect than the first. The baptism of blood makes us more pure than the baptism of water. For there are very few indeed who having received the baptism of the water, can keep it uncorrupted even to the end of their life. But he who has been baptised with the baptism of blood cannot sin henceforth. By the baptism of water past sins are purified but that, by the baptism of blood, future sins are also taken away. In baptism sins are removed, in martyrdom sins are destroyed. According to St. Cyprian, baptism of blood which is martyrdom is greater as to grace, more sublime as to power, more valuable as to honour. In the baptism of blood it is the angel who baptize, God and His Christ exult, a baptism after which no one sins, a baptism which unites us with God as soon as we have left the world. In the baptism of water, we receive the remission of sins but in the baptism of blood, the crown of virtues. Just as the idea of martyrdom as a second baptism, Fathers considered monasticism as a second baptism and monastic asceticism as the spirit of martyrdom.<sup>14</sup>

#### 1.4.6 Martyrdom and Anchoritism

Origen's Exhortation to Martyrdom teaches us that the ideal of asceticism is the equivalent of martyrdom. Monasticism is not simply asceticism but an asceticism having a life separated from the world, apart from the world and it is the most salient characteristic. Even this had its immediate preparation in persecutions. Persecutions could cause faithful Christians to retire to the desert and there freely lead a life of the most precarious kind. When the world became too friendly to Christianity but without any alteration in its ways and its spirit, this contradictory situation also lead them to take the same road, so as to find once more, along with austerity, the detachment and the fervour they had known and could no longer know in a life suddenly became too easy in the world.<sup>15</sup>

It was not by chance that anchoritism spread so suddenly when the State made its peace with the Church. A world in which Christians were separated and proscribed was succeeded by a world in which they came to be in honour. But the spirit of the world had hardly changed for all that. In this contradictory situation the zealous Christians freely choose the state of proscription which is no longer imposed on them. In a world which no longer treated them as enemies, they felt obliged to live as enemies of the world. They understood well that unless this they would soon become its slaves<sup>16</sup>. The reaction was so natural that it

<sup>14</sup> Margaret R. Miles. *Fullness of Life: Historical Foundations for a New Asceticism*. p.33.

<sup>15</sup> L. Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, vol.1, The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers. p. 305.

<sup>16</sup> L. Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, vol.1, The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers, p.306.



seems more and more to have been spontaneously the same in more than one place at the same time<sup>17</sup>. Antiquity believed that monasticism, having been born in Egypt, was diffused everywhere from there. Modern research has shown that Syrian monasticism preceded Egyptian. It seems that monasticism appeared in both countries simultaneously and quite independently.

## 2. Eastern origin of Christian Monasticism

Christian monasticism is a movement of asceticism and withdrawal, seeking a life of prayer in celibacy and simplicity.<sup>18</sup> Even though monasticism soon acquired predominantly a communitarian aspect, at the heart of monastic experience has always emphasis to solitude and the stillness it can foster. This is behind the other fundamental characteristics that describe monasticism, primarily its disciplined renunciation and its rich traditions of prayer. Many authors have considered monasticism as 'spiritual martyrdom' for the Church in a danger of losing its fervour.<sup>19</sup> Although the monks did describe themselves as undergoing 'white martyrdom' this explanation of the movement's origins can be easily understood. There were also socio-political and economic reasons why flight to the desert would be appealing to many at this period.<sup>20</sup>

### 2.1 Origin of Christian Sannyasa

The desert fathers were the Christian hermits, ascetics and Monks who lived mainly in the Scetes desert of Egypt, beginning in around the third century. The original desert hermits were Christians fleeing the chaos and persecution of the Roman Empire's crisis of the third century. Records from this time indicate that Christians often lived in tombs and trash heaps on the edges of major cities, more or less protected by their obscurity.<sup>21</sup> Persecution and martyrdom ended soon. Many of the pagan kings received the Christianity and the Christian religion became the official religion of the states. As result Christianity got secularized. Compared to the early status it is considered to be a decline in intensity and love for Jesus Christ.<sup>22</sup> Even in this new situation many of them continued to live in these marginal areas.

These individuals believed that desert life would teach them to eschew the things of this world and that will enable them to follow God's call in a more deliberate and perfect way. Thus, during the fourth century, the empty areas around Egyptian cities continued to attract Christians from the world over, wishing to live in solitude. As the lifestyle developed, these men and women developed a reputation

<sup>17</sup> L. Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, vol.1, The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers, p. 306.

<sup>18</sup> Breck, J. "Prayer of the Heart: Sacrament of the Presence of God". P. 28-34.

<sup>19</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6:42.

<sup>20</sup> D.M. De Druille. *From East to West*. p. 55-60. Also see Samuel Rubenson, "Christian Asceticism and the Emergence of the Monastic Tradition", in *Asceticism*, ed. By Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis. p. 53.

<sup>21</sup> Corneanu N. "The Jesus Prayer and Dedication". p. 6-12.

<sup>22</sup> F. Cabrol, "Monasticism", *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol.viii, p.781-782.

for holiness and wisdom<sup>23</sup>. In its early form, each hermit followed more or less an individual spiritual program, perhaps learning some basic practices from other monks, but developing them into their own unique practice.<sup>24</sup>

### 2.1.1 Ascetic Persons or Thapasar

Even during the time of persecution there were Christians who were living Christianity with the help of asceticism, taking the cross of mortification and following Christ. They were considered to be white martyrs and they were respected highly. From the second century on there were ascetics in the Church, living in houses, dedicated for ecclesial duties, leading life of celibacy. People respected their model life and especially the celibacy. Gradually the form got developed to the stage that there is formal profession of their dedication and celibacy and the violation of which is an ecclesiastically punishable wrong. There was a rather precise form for this style of life. By the third century there were many like this and they had a dignity and prescribed duty in the community. Gradually they became powerful, dignified group in the community and as the number grew intensity went down. The duties for them were gradually given to the anointed people of clerical order<sup>25</sup>.

### 2.1.2 Ascetic Persons in the Wilderness

In this situation the true and genuine or those who are eager in ascetic people had a

deviation in their thinking. Unless they move away from the family and relatives it will not do well. They went to deserts and started ascetic living. They renounced everything and followed Christ, taking his cross of mortification. Asceticism and withdrawal from the world constituted the Christian *sannyasa*. During the persecution world was in enmity of the Christians and the Christianity as well. World was after the persecution in enmity with Christianity and friendship with Christians. There was no change in the part of the world, but the Christians gradually became the under the bondage of the influence of the world and worldliness. This contradictory situation was an eye opener for many genuine Christians and they recognized the fact that the world is a hindrance for true way of Christian living. To regenerate the intensity of the beginning stage was there aim in life. They earnestly tried to keep up the early Christian spirituality. Naturally many were attracted to this particular way of life<sup>26</sup>.

In the fourth century the Christian *sannyasa* was not something new. But the fact that there were Christians who lived in the spirit of the world was something new. The route of the Christian *sannyasa* is in the spirit filled lives of early Christians and their efforts to sustain the quality of Christian living which is following the ideals of evangelical teachings. The life and the teachings of Christ are the only source and inspiration for this. There is no greater Christianity than the (early) *sannyasa*. This is the ideal way of Christian living.

<sup>23</sup> M. De Dreuille. *From East to West*, p. 55-60.

<sup>24</sup> C. Butler, "Monasticism", in *Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol.1, p. 525-526.

<sup>25</sup> F. Cabrol, "Monasticism", *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol.viii, p.781-782.

<sup>26</sup> C. Butler, "Monasticism", in *Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol.1, p. 525-526.



Christian *sannyasa* is the product of the ecclesia itself<sup>27</sup>. It is from the inner reflective nature, the dense spiritual interiority of the Church. It is the result of the effort to achieve and sustain the spiritual fullness in Christian spirituality, Christian living and intimacy with Jesus Christ. Soon this phenomenon of *sannyasa* grew in the spiritually fertile soil of Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Persia, and Asia Minor with the cultural adaptations of the respective places<sup>28</sup>.

## 2.2 Egyptian Sannyasa

Egypt is the centre of the primitive eastern *sannyasa*. So many books and other documents are available for us to know about them. There were so many who went into the wilderness and desert and started living in loneliness that is called anchorites. Among them is St. Anthony the Great (251-356) is the most important person<sup>29</sup>.

### 2.2.1 Antony the Great

Antony the great was born in middle Egypt, Kome. Parents were farmers. In his 20th age he lost parents. In his young age he was attracted to the radical way of living Christianity by apostles and early Christians. Inspired by Mt19, 21, he shared what he had with others and entrusted his sister with community of *qeaama* and started living in a hut. He was guided by experienced ascetic. He visited other anchorites and learned from them. In the second stage he moved to lonely

place, away from his native place stayed on cave, fighting with devil, attacked by them. Love for Christ and intimacy with Jesus was the weapon to fight against evil.<sup>30</sup> In the third stage, with the permission of the spiritual father, he crossed the river Nile in desert, near the mountain Pisper, in an avoided fort. He spent in lonely living doing penances, mortification, contemplating the word of God, self-discipline and hard work. After twenty years of this period one of his friends insisted him to come out, and then this period ended. When he came out he was filled with Holy Spirit, with perfect tranquillity, self-detached, having all the gifts and grace for spiritual guidance. People of every area of life came to him with their problems and had satisfaction.

He was called the spiritual healer of the Egypt. After that often he came out to talk to the people, giving advises, solutions to their problems. But he was aware that just as a fish deprived of water cannot live, he cannot live without loneliness and prayer. He used to withdraw to the lonely desert. At the age of 105 he died. He renounced everything in order to seek God and to be one with God. Doing severe penance and doing hard work to help others, he lived a life of self-mortification. He is the reflection of the early monasticism. He is called the *Father of Monasticism* and *Star of the Desert*<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> L.Boyer, *The Spirituality of the New Testament, and the Fathers*, p.303-304.

<sup>28</sup> D.M. De Dreuille, *From East to West*, p. 55-60.

<sup>29</sup> William Skudlarek, ed. *The Continuing Quest for God*, p. 63-64.

<sup>30</sup> Athanasius, *Life of St. Antony*, trn. Rbert C. Gregg. P. 31-32.

<sup>31</sup> C.Butler, "Monasticism", in *Cambridge Medieval History*. Vol.1, p. 525-526.

### 2.2.2 Community Life and Abba Pakomius

The number of anchorites increased and there were increased interactions among them. The spiritual patrimony and the resulted living around the spiritual father was the cause of these interactions. Schetes, Nisthria, Kellia are the places mainly we see such fathers. Sppolo, pittikon, Doppres, Ammon, Seraphion, Makarius of Egypt, Evagrius Ponthikus are the main renounced spiritual fathers of the East of the early monasticism. Other than spiritual advices they did not have any other authority over them.<sup>32</sup> In this time there raised a famous desert father in the horizon of the desert spirituality that is Abba Pakomius. Pakomius brought the natural gradual transition from anchorites to communitarian monasticism got an order and stability.

He was working in military and after than closed in a jail. The Christians monks who visited him in jail influenced him, especially their fellowship<sup>33</sup>. He became a Christian and monk and having got a vision, he established monastery and started giving service to them. Among the inmates there were some who were not ready to follow the common regulations which resulted in sending them away. Though he was disappointed with this initial experience, after some time some came with good intention. He examined their will and desire and received him giving the religious habit. He gave them constitutions and taught

them ascetical life<sup>34</sup>. When time went more people came and in the place called Thabanithi the coenobitical life, the community life in the true sense started. Common rule and an authority to which all are obliged to submit ones will are new contributions of this stage.<sup>35</sup>

### 2.2.3 The Regulations of Monastic Life

All lived in same place within the same enclosure, separated from the world. There were regulations on the contacts and interactions with outsiders. Cells, Chapel and refectory were within the enclosure. Regarding food, they had together, same food in same place at same time. There were other strict regulations regarding food. Praying together, thrice a day is called Synaxis, in which they discussed of matter for common life, corrected each other. Personal prayer and reading and meditating the Scriptures which is *Lection Divinia* were given most importance. They prayed always even during work but they had time only for praying, reading and meditating the Scriptures. Pakomius was not in favour of Monks receiving Holy Order. He suspected, will the Monks have ego or proud resulted by it. He insisted on common work together, it will help the mortification, fellowship and with this they could help others. He insisted on equality among the monks, common and uniform dress food, things. Constitution which binds everybody equally was given to them.

<sup>32</sup> William Skudlarek, ed. *The Continuing quest for God*, Minnesota, 1982, p. 63-64.

<sup>33</sup> C. Butler, "Monasticism", in *Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol.1, p.525-526. Also see Ignatius Puthiadam, *A short History of Religius Life*, p.40-45.

<sup>34</sup> *The Life of St. Pachomius*, trn. Armoand Villiux, p.28-31.

<sup>35</sup> Jose Cristo Rey Gracia Paredes. *The Theology of Religius Life: From the Origin to Our Days*. p.21-13.



The authenticity was based on scriptures and the constitution was filled with verses from Scriptures and spirit of Scripture. Obedience is most important and over pervading all. Even the authority is under obedience of the constitution. They are the ministers and interpreters of the constitution. Humility is necessary for obedience. Obedience is necessity for spiritual perfection<sup>36</sup>. Simplicity of lifestyle and renouncing selfishness, possessions, and relations are the essentials of monastic living. There should be an internal formation according to the external mortifications. They did mortification as penance for their own past sins and the sins of the whole world. It also helped them to be vigilant against the temptation coming to their lives at every moment. There should not be over excitement and for this there should be discernment<sup>37</sup>.

Mutual love, serving each other caring for each other were important, forgiving each other was also very important since individual growing not on the spur of a moment. This constitution was decorated with prudence, tranquillity, maturity. There should be regulation and control on anything. This control and regulation was there in work and mortification. It was accessible for any ordinary person<sup>38</sup>. When the number increased there were other houses opened and twice a year they gathered together in the mother house. After Pakomius there were some crisis in their living but under the leadership Hordoyosios and Theodor their constitution was renewed in the course of

time. In the fourth century there were two streams of *sannyasa* in Egypt, one is Anchorites and the second is monasticism. Both lived with same purpose, but different lifestyle and ways. There is critical remark made, Constitution and regulations spoiled the liberty and spontaneity of asceticism. But in the course of history, monasticism got advantage over anchorites. Egyptian monasticism is strong influence on the whole religious monastic movement all over the world.

#### 2.2.4. Monasticism among Women

Pakomius established a house for women under the leadership of his sister Mary. There were many in this house on the shore of Nile. Ammonius started houses for women. In Egypt there were many houses for women *sanniasinies*. Palladius and Theodor give descriptions about *sanniasinies* in their historical works. There was a community of virgins with which St. Antony entrusted his sister before begins his monastic ascetical life. Wherever there we get the history of ascetics we have the descriptions of women of that sort also. Amma Sara who lived in the shore of Nile without any fear, Amma Sinkertica, Jelasia the collection of peace, Magna who was burned with the love of the poor are some of the examples for them. They mostly lived in community<sup>39</sup>.

In Palestine the friends of St. Jerome, Paula and Euthokitta started houses for *Ammas*. The famous Melania and her grant daughter

<sup>36</sup> *Pachomian Chronicles and Rules*, trn. Armad Villiux, p.154-57.

<sup>37</sup> *Pachomian Chronicles and Rules*, trn. Armad Villiux. p. 160.

<sup>38</sup> *Pachomian Chronicles and Rules*, trn. Armad Villiux, p.160.

<sup>39</sup> F. Cabrol, "Monasticism", *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. viii, p.781-782.

started a hose in the Mt. Olive. The other two famous people are Fabiola and Egeria. In short from the very beginning there were women sanniasines along with men sanniasines. They had uniform dress, and followed the rules of the men sanniasines. Simplicity of lifestyle and severe asceticism were specialties of it. Prayer, fasting, charitable activities, studying the 'scriptures and the writings of the fathers' and physical labour were the activities of their life. They proved that the fullness of the womanhood is not only in the fulfilment of the physical motherhood but also in the spiritual motherhood<sup>40</sup>.

### 2.3 Syrian Sannyasa

It was thought that the disciples of Pakkomius among them Mar Ougen only brought the monasticism to Syria. But there is doubt regarding these based on contemporary information. Source of this particular way of life was Sermon on the Mountain in Matthew's Gospel or the sermon on the plane in Luke's Gospel. Poverty and hunger in disciple's life are the fundamental notion behind. Wealth is a hindrance for Christian discipleship. A disciple should not have a permanent dwelling place or wealth. He should renounce family life and take up cross every day. They made oneself eunuch for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Unmarried status in the epistles of Paul, it is for the freedom or the liberty from the bondages.

Regarding the food of John the Baptist honey and milk are the food of John the Baptist in the desert and that is the food of

the people in heaven or the kingdom of God. About marriage, the people of the 'age yet to come' do not marry. They are like the angels in heaven. They have the anticipated experience of the resurrection in the world itself. They were called *Qeyama* the daughters of the covenant, that is the baptism. *Qeyama* has also the meaning the resurrection. The apocryphal books of the Acts of the Apostles also give notions of early monastic understanding of life. They give importance to the salvation of the souls. Salvation is possible only for the souls and the body is in contradiction with soul. So whatever that of body is to be resisted.<sup>41</sup>

A Christian is strange person or a pilgrim in this world. He is in a journey; he has no permanent dwelling in this world. Aphrahath's 23 demonstrations among them the sixth one gives the detailed explanation about virginity. Messiah was not of this world, so we should be strangers for the world. Those who want to be equal to the angels must be away from the world. This stay away is very important in understanding the eagerness towards the concept of chastity. This is a stay away from the world. Chastity is holiness (*kadeeshe*) which means untouched by the world. *Kadeesh* is one who is separated or untouched, the opposite is touched by the other or the world

#### 2.3.1. In Ephrem's Writings

It is an extraordinary living. It is without any additional formation or artificiality of modernization. It is to greatest extent intimate with nature or that of wild way of life. They considered anything that of modernization to

<sup>40</sup> William Skudlarek, ed. *The Continuing Quest for God*, p.63-64.

<sup>41</sup> C. Butler, "Monasticism", in *Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol.1, p.525-526.



be that of evil. Those *sannyasies* were more similar to a hunting bird than a human. It was a withdrawal to the tribal way of wild living. It was aiming at the life of men in Paradise. This was the too intense way of living in desert, fighting with devil and nature. It is a status in constant relation and conversations with God. They renounced fire, cloth, shelter. They imposed on oneself the most brutal way of mortifications. They tried to imitate the death of martyrs during the time of persecution.

In Syria it was lonely or single life was largely predominant. Growing into the community life was gradual. When the number increased the gravity of brutal way of treating oneself got lesser. Due to the social situation many came and helped the ecclesiastical communities.<sup>42</sup> In the beginning third century all over Syria it got a tremendous growth. The desert was full of *Ibidae*. And gradual they started to live together just as in the Egypt. It was also based on the experienced father, and they lived around the father. This was called *Laura*.<sup>43</sup> This annihilated the spontaneity, individual creativity and liberty of the person. But it caused the fellowship among them and gradually it grew into the communitarian life. Such houses in which *Ibidae* lived are called *Diara*.

The growth of Syrian *sannyasa* caused decline in its spiritual content, the external luxury, and lack prayer due to the external activities. The common wealth grew tremendously. In a stage of growth there

were attempts to go back to the early spirit. The rule of Rabulla the bishop of Edesa was an example for it. Alexander a Koimtoi and his disciples established model houses and lived in poverty spirit. Barsouma who is called the son of fasting, tried to bring back the spirit of asceticism and mortification into the Syrian *sannyasa*.

### 2.3.2 Simon the Stylists

The Stylites were the most extraordinary of anchorites. The pioneer, St. Simeon of Antioch was undoubtedly a holy and obedient man who literally went up to God. After his youthful enthusiasm of chaining himself to a rock had been rebuked by the hierarchy, he perched himself on a *stylos* or pillar, at first ten, later thirty feet high. Thence he preached to sightseers, confirming his words with miracles. He had imitators who, however, did not always manifest his spirit of deference to authority. Eremitical life nourished some souls of surpassing sanctity and self-denial. But it seemed to be an unreachable and dangerous for ordinary aspirants to asceticism. For most people some sort of blend of retirement and the common life should be worked out.

St. Simon the stylist is most famous among the Syrian ascetics. Theodoret has written his life when he is alive. He was born of a Christian parents. He baptized in early childhood. His father was rich, had sheep. He did not get formal education. In his young age he moved to asceticism. He followed

<sup>42</sup> C. Butler, "Monasticism", in *Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol.1, p. 525-526.

<sup>43</sup> The word *Laura* means village where people live together. It was meant to be a new culture based on new lifestyle.

severe asceticism and hidden from others. Later it was known to others and it brought disliking from other inmates. Then he moved to Telnetian for lonely life of severe asceticism. The severe ascetical life style brought to him wide reputation. As a result lot of people came to him for many purposes. These ascetics considered these visitors also from a mortification perspective. Simon did not take such vows. When the number of the visitors increased uncontrolled, he found pillar as remedy. To escape from the people Jesus withdrew to lonely place in a boat. Though visitors were mortification it became hindrance for prayer.<sup>44</sup> Activities of *sannyasi* shouldn't be a hindrance for prayer which is the primary end of religious or ascetical life. Still he received the visitors from 3o clock to sunset. There were visitors from every part of the world and every area of life. The main virtue that they exercised was interceding for the people from whom they separated themselves and came out. Though they were living against the nature and calamities attacked them, they had amazing long span of life. He lived for 105 years and he did not have a dramatized death. Two days after becoming still a disciple went up and confirmed that he is dead. His body was taken to Antioch with solemn procession.

After Simon the pillar became style of asceticism, it was the sign of spiritual greatness. Simon was the continuation of prophetic living and martyrdom. He is considered as the head of those who lament. Those who want to do the ransom of the sin, expiation of sins are blessed. They are the "*instrumentum satisfactionis*"

and also part taking in the passion of Jesus Christ. As the history explains the transition from the *ihidae* to *diara* was not easy in Syria. Even in the community life they kept up many of the practices and the forms of anchorites. They considered as it is the way of perfecting the *ihidae* life. That is the reason in Syria there are many fathers are predominant and there are variety of practices and ways of living. There is no uniform way of living and common founder and statutes and regulations of life.

### 2.3.3 Ideals of Syrian *Sannyasa*

Mortification and ascetic living are the centre this. They are the fighters against selfishness and Satan for Christ and the Church. Control of senses and mortification are essential to it. Suffering and the conformity with the cross and the passion of Christ are the main characteristics. It is continuation of martyrdom. Mortification of body and renouncing the pleasure of the senses are very important means to reach the ideal. Prayer is the centre of it. Common prayer, personal prayer, Bible reading, reading of the spiritual works of the fathers etc. are included in it. Prayer must be united with ascetical activities. Praying together in same form, under the same roof and under the same guidance of the same spiritual father bring unity and oneness in spirit and purpose. The superior of the community was called "*Rees Diara*". His duty was to regulate common activities, and felicitate the common life and look after the spiritual growth of the community<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> C. Butler, "Monasticism", in *Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol.1, p. 525-526.

<sup>45</sup> F. Cabrol, "Monasticism", *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. Vol.viii, p.781-782.



### 2.3.4. Activities

There was no importance for physical work in Syrian *sannyasa* which was different in Egyptian tradition. They were depending on the fruits of the nature for their livelihood or at the charity of others. But there were people working without the hindrance to their ascetical prayer life. When common life was introduced it was necessary to work for the livelihood. Motivations behind work were poverty and simplicity. It was also to release of tension out of loneliness and silence. It helped them to escape from the arrogance and pride. Later they were involved in pastoral activities. They started teaching people. They were forced to take the Holy Order. There were ordained bishops from monks. People went to them with their problems. They know the secrets of people's problems. People experienced the miraculous power of the monks<sup>46</sup>.

They were also involved in missionary activities. They went to strange places and lived there. With their exemplary life and words they transformed the places into Christianity. They were also involved in serving the guest seeing God in them. They were merciful to the poor and handicapped. They took stand for the poor people against social injustice. They were helping them by collecting money from the rich people. They have contributed to the world of literature and intellectual world. The atmosphere in religious houses was conducive for the prayer, reflection and writing. They taught the people using every possible method. They were yearning power of prayer

and they share that power with the people through their apostolic activities.

### 2.3.5. The Daughters of the Covenant

*B'nai Qeiam*a or *B'nath Qeiam*a is a speciality of the Syrian *sannyasa*. It means young men and women taking the vow of chastity, committing themselves to Christ and prayer life. It is life of a resurrected status, or the glorified status<sup>47</sup>. The daughters of the covenant took the vow of virginity and became the brides of Christ. The rules of Rabbula manifest vigilance in protecting this virtue of virginity. It is forbidden for them to live with men. With regard to the *benat Qeiam*a, the daughters of the covenant, greater stress is placed upon communal life. In the Rabbula's rule it is commanded that if possible, they should live together. The place where the *benat Qeiam*a were gathered into communal life is called 'Umra'.

There are some differences in female monasticism from that of male. Very few women identified this ideal with the flight from towns. Amma Sarra is the only woman remembered among the Fathers of the Desert. Monasticism of women was lived at home or in house transformed into monastery. Inside the ancient female monastic world prayer has got same value as for the male monks. It is the fundamental element of everyday life, gives rhythm to both physical and spiritual time, both personal and communal. Prayer helped the women monastics to overcome her natural weakness and to reach the dimension of a great

<sup>46</sup> William Skudlarek, ed. *The Continuing Quest for God*, p. 63-64.

<sup>47</sup> C. Butler, "Monasticism", in *Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol.1, p. 525-526.

ascetic. From the third century onwards Christian writers wrote many treatises on the subject of virginity and on the correct behaviour of women who wanted to consecrate themselves to God. Virginity is a kind of perfection typical of divine and immaterial nature and that human being, both male and female, must imitate.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

It was an attempt to know the relevance of the spiritual ideals of desert spirituality and the ascetical life style of early monasticism today which emerged and developed in the spiritually fertile soil of eastern Christendom. We are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the second Vatican council which called the Church to go to the sources to get revitalized and renewed. No one can deny the fact that the entire Christian life and especially the religious life have its source in early Christian community.

The ideals of the early Christian community and which was continued in a radical way in the changed situation by the early ascetic fathers are to be understood collectively.

The ascetical fathers never considered themselves as superior to others. They considered them as the servants of those who are in the world and they served them by their prayer and hard work. The withdrawal from the world and ascetical practices were not the protest against the humanity but it was an attempt to regain the true self which is now influenced by the external social forces and worldly elements. They tried to preserve the Christianity without the corruption of the world. The ideals they tried to live are challenging to us who live in this consumerist world. They created a city of counter culture in the desert and people were attracted came there. Thus the desert became the 'true city' where people enjoyed perfect tranquillity.



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# The Silent Giant of Modern Ecclesiology: The Legacy of Johann Adam Möhler\*

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## Introduction

Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838) had a very short life. His academic activities comprise a short period of only fourteen years. In the history of ecclesiology, Möhler is the most important Roman Catholic figure in the formation of ecclesiology as a field of systematic theology. Before his generation, the principle concerns of ecclesiologists were the structural and political concerns of the Church. Möhler's ecclesiology altered this direction and recast ecclesiology as the study of the nature of a historical community with a supernatural mission. Thus, Möhler stands out as a silent giant in the long line of theologians of the nineteenth century who paved the way for the revival of the Church's self understanding (*ecclesia ad intra*) and its relation to other communities in the world (*ecclesia ad extra*) in Vatican II. As the Church carries forward the spirit and fruits of Vatican II, it is important to explore the origins and potency of Möhler's germinal theology and to examine the methods by which he was able to make a clear

departure from the institutional view of the Church.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the perennial significance of Möhler's ecclesiological vision for the self understanding of the Catholic Church, as well as its relation with other Christian and non-Christian communities. Beyond this general goal, this analytical study will also specify the methodological tension underlying the genesis of Möhler's ecclesiology, a methodology which can inform and encourage contemporary ecclesiologists to search out new models of the Church.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section unfolds the cultural context and major intellectual influences on Möhler. Here, I will highlight the major works of Möhler and examine his methodology which allowed him to propose a vibrant theology. The second section elaborates the ecclesiology of Möhler. This will involve specifying the three distinct stages of his thought and the

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thrust of his ecclesiology which is evident in the institutional, pneumatocentric and christocentric paradigms. The third section will highlight the significance of his contribution especially in the development of the ecclesiology of Vatican II and the subsequent epoch. In the conclusion, I will argue that the dynamic metaphor of 'ongoing incarnation' enables the conception of the wholeness of the Church and can make the Church ever relevant to the unpredictable complexities of the future.

Not all of Möhler's works are yet translated into English. The available translations include his two master pieces: *The Unity in the Church* (1825) and *The Symbolism* (1831). Except for these two works, other references used in this paper will be from secondary sources. It is my hope that this paper will facilitate more appreciation for Möhler's germinal thinking and will help explore his concepts and methodologies resulting in better articulations of an ecclesiology for the future.

## 1. Evolution and Method of Möhler's Ecclesiology

Every person is a representative of his or her time. Johann Adam Möhler was deeply influenced by the peculiarities of his era and influenced by the persons with whom he interacted. Besides the external influences, one can also notice the shifts in his own thinking as

he matured in his career as a theologian. Therefore, the ecclesiology of Möhler can be best understood by situating it within the cultural, religious and intellectual milieu of early nineteenth century Germany which shaped the methods and content of his ecclesiology.

### 1.1. Möhler's Milieu

The characteristic features of the period of Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) dominated and influenced practical life in Germany, especially between the eighteenth century and the middle of nineteenth century. The Enlightenment by and large reduced religion to the knowledge of God's existence.<sup>1</sup> In order to combat alleged superstitions and mechanical ritualism, proponents of *Aufklärung* sought to simplify and rationalize the liturgical life of the people. Private Holy Masses, pilgrimages and popular devotions were discouraged.<sup>2</sup> Möhler was familiar with *Aufklärung* Catholicism, both as a result of growing up in enlightened parishes and also due to his seminary training which was based on *Aufklärung* principles. The Enlightenment's emphasis on freedom and reason climaxed in the political and social realms and the hitherto independent Catholic Church in Germany became an organ of the secular state. Möhler feared that the growing power of the state would fuel its totalitarian and nationalistic ideologies which in turn could hamper human freedom.<sup>3</sup> He believed that the

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed exposition of the impact of the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) on German Catholicism see: Leonardo Swidler, *Aufklärung Catholicism 1780-1850: Liturgical and Other Reforms in the Catholic Aufklärung* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Michael J. Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation: Johann Adam Möhler and the Beginnings of Modern Ecclesiology* (New York: The Cross Road Publishing Company, 1997), 15.

<sup>3</sup> For a concise description of the socio-political changes and their impact on philosophy and theology see R.W. Franklin, *Nineteenth Century Churches: The History of a New Catholicism in Wurttemberg, England and France* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1987), 9.

Church alone had the potential to safeguard human freedom and transcend borders.

As a reaction to the Enlightenment and its perceived connection to the negative socio-political shifts, there developed movements like idealism and romanticism. Idealism refused to give reason to the sole role in discovering what was real. German idealism distinguished between the phenomenal world and the noumenal world. Based on this distinction, a new understanding of divine revelation was shaped according to which the divine is the 'noumenon' behind every phenomenal manifestation.<sup>4</sup>

Parallel to idealism, a cultural current known as romanticism, permeated the intellectual life in Germany. Romanticism opposed the fragmentation and growing alienation of the people by stressing the importance of the community. The human person was understood as a social being.<sup>5</sup> For the romantics, the cosmos was a dynamic organic whole, a living and evolving organism.<sup>6</sup> Everything in the universe was evolving according to the dialectic of a grand cosmic pulsation: thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. Romanticism, through its historical consciousness, restored a sense of tradition.

Möhler used much of what was 'in the air' at his time. There are also other elements in his thought which can be traced to particular influential figures contemporary to him.

## 1.2. The Influence of Individual Theologians

There are many contemporary figures to Möhler who are generally acknowledged to have had some direct or indirect influence on him throughout his career. However, I wish to introduce here the most important ones: Friedrich Schleiermacher, Johann Michael Sailer and Johann Sebastian Drey.

The influence of Friedrich Schleiermacher is most apparent especially in Möhler's initial works. Religion, for Schleiermacher, was not to be conceived in terms of its external manifestations nor in terms of any extrinsic values, but rather in its own inherent values as a distinct faculty of the spirit. For Schleiermacher, "religions were the feeling of ascension."<sup>7</sup> He further specified this feeling as a consciousness of absolute dependence.<sup>8</sup> Möhler explores and applies the same to the Church. The Church is the coming together of a community due to a common religious experience, an experience of spirit-filled love that draws

<sup>4</sup> Serge Bolshakoff, *The Doctrine of the Unity of the Church in the Works of Khomyakov and Möhler* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1948), 221.

<sup>5</sup> It was the romantic Novalis (Novalis was the pseudonym of Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg (1772–1801) an author and philosopher of early German Romanticism) who proposed that "the human community was the reflection of the innermost essence of man" See: Donald J. Dietrich, *The Goethezeit and the Metamorphosis of Catholic Theology in the Age of Idealism* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1979), 25.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Riga, "The Ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhler," *Theological Studies* 22/4 (1961), 570.

<sup>7</sup> Dietrich, *The Goethezeit and the Metamorphosis of Catholic Theology*, 25.

<sup>8</sup> James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought: From Enlightenment to Vatican II* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., 1971), 96.



believers together.<sup>9</sup>

Another figure that influenced Möhler was Johann Michael Sailer. Sailer maintained that the Church is the living divine-human organization which is a bearer of a living tradition. It was in this tradition that the Church was founded. Möhler uses Sailer's insights to emphasize the primary role of tradition understood as the self-consciousness of the Church.<sup>10</sup> Sailer rejected the distinction of the visible and invisible Church as separate entities. For Sailer, the Church is the spirit filled members who together form the body of Christ. This idea was taken as such by Möhler in explaining the role of the Holy Spirit in the community of believers.

Sebastian Drey was the founder of the Catholic faculty at the University of Tübingen. According to Peter Riga, Drey was the most influential figure behind Möhler's thought.<sup>11</sup> Möhler learned from Drey the notion that God's objective revelation continues in the Church's history. Moreover, this revelation takes on a different external manifestation as the community lives through its history. From Drey's lectures, Möhler pictured an ideal Christianity, as similar to the community lived during the time of early Church fathers.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.3. Möhler's Ecclesiological Method

Möhler's method of engaging history was shaped by 'romantic organics' according to which human communities develop organically, that is, they evolve through history both changing and remaining the same. In addition, he engaged a 'scientific method' of moving from faith to knowledge. According to this method, there exists a central idea underneath all the phenomena which makes the understanding of the historical facts possible. Möhler perceived the visible Church as a manifestation of a central idea.<sup>13</sup> In the central idea of God becoming incarnate, Möhler explores how this accounts for everything that the Church is and consists of. Möhler employed Friedrich von Schelling's principle of 'the relationship of the ideal and the real,' according to which the ideal and the real are inseparably linked and depend on one another. Nevertheless, the ideal is primary and concrete; historical and communal expressions are secondary.<sup>14</sup> Möhler understood the Church in Schellingian terms: "the Church is the embodiment of a lived spirituality, the harmony of infinite in the finite expressed outwardly."<sup>15</sup> For Möhler, the Church is always the same, yet always evolving. It is a dynamic organism developing throughout history, but at the same time it maintains and preserves its

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 120. Cf. also Michael J. Himes, "A Great Theologian of our Time: Möhler on Schleimacher", *The Heythrop Journal*, 37 (1996), 29.

<sup>10</sup> Philip J. Rosato, "Between Christocentrism and Pneumatocentrism: An Interpretation of Johann Adam Möhler's Ecclesiology," *The Heythrop Journal* 19, (1978), 52.

<sup>11</sup> Riga, "The Ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhler," 570.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas M. O'Meara, *Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism: Schelling and the Theologians* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 148.

<sup>13</sup> Riga, "The Ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhler," 570.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Franklin, *Nineteenth Century Churches*, 111.

<sup>15</sup> Franklin, *Nineteenth Century Churches*, 112.

core uncorrupted. The development of his own work shows that Möhler attempted to maintain a mediated polarization and interaction between the outward and inward aspects of Christianity.<sup>16</sup> Essential to his thought was the conviction that to opt for one aspect over the other was to deny the inherently relational and dialectical character of Christian existence.

#### 1.4. The Major Works and Development of Ecclesiology

The intellectual development of Möhler's notion of the Church is very evident from the content of his theological works at the different stages of his brief yet brilliant career as a theologian. There are three major works: 1. *Die Einheit der Kirche* (1825, *The Unity of the Church*); 2. *Athanasius der Gross* (1827, *Athanasius the Great*) and 3. *Symbolik* (1832, *Symbolism*). Before the publication of *Einheit*, Möhler wrote regularly in *Theologische Quartalschrift* (1823-25) chiefly on Canon Law. The ecclesiological tensions evident at different stages include: hierarchical notions of the Church during his discourses on Canon Law (1823-1824),<sup>17</sup> the rejection of an essential

hierarchical order evident in his book, *Unity in the Church*, and the attempt to resolve these tensions in his final work, *Symbolism*.<sup>18</sup> Scholars<sup>19</sup> observe that the content of *Athanasius the Great* focuses mainly on theological anthropology, which facilitated the shift from pneumatocentrism to christocentrism in Möhler's thinking, emphasizing the subjective experience of Christ in the Church. In each stage of Möhler's intellectual development, his chief concern was to preserve a proper balance between the Christian understanding of the objective person of Christ at a privileged point in history, on the one hand, and the subjective experience of Christ by the community at any given point in its spirit-led history on the other.

#### 2. Möhler's Ecclesiological Odyssey

As evident from this preliminary analysis of the development of his ecclesiology, it is clear that his ecclesiology was not static at any point in his career. On the contrary, it was a progressive development, embodied in his two major works, *Einheit* and *Symbolik*. In order to have a greater sense of appreciation for the progress he made in his theological efforts

<sup>16</sup> This is the opinion given by Cardinal Ratzinger: Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, Translation by J.R. Foster (New York: Macmillan Pub. Co. Inc., 1969), 184. See also Rosato, "Between Christocentrism and Pneumatocentrism," 47.

<sup>17</sup> These were published mainly in the journal - *Theologische Quartalschrift* between 1823 and 1824. Today they are collected and published in three volumes as *Kirchenrechtliche Vorlesungen*, which translates as canonical lectures. These were edited by Reinhold Rieger in 1992. Reinhold Rieger, *Kirchenrechtliche Vorlesungen* (3 Vols), (Munich: Erichewel Verlag, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 60-72.

<sup>19</sup> Leading Theological Anthropologists like Mark Worthing, Christian Mostert, Gerard Kelly, Jim Weymouth & Graham Roberts have acknowledged the originality of Möhler's *Athanasius Der Grosse*. Cf. Charles Cameron, "An Introduction to 'Theological Anthropology,'" *Evangel* 23/2 (Summer 2005), 53-61. Citing Möhler, Jürgen Moltmann speaks of our being as 'God's proxy in the community of creation,' precisely as the image of God. Cf. J. Moltmann, *God in Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 188.



and to understand some of the premises operative in that development, this section will focus on three important orientations Möhler held during his career.

## 2.1. The Church as a Society: The Antithetical Starting Point (1822-1825)

Möhler's first reflection on the Church is found in his lectures on canon law which he delivered at the University of Tübingen between 1823 and 1825. What is most interesting about them is that Möhler, who has often been considered in the handbooks of ecclesiology as representing a view of the Church which is essentially the opposite of Robert Bellarmine, starts his career as a theologian holding a very similar view to that of Bellarmine's ecclesiology. The latter stressed the visible nature of the Church in the face of the Protestant emphasis on the invisible. In his efforts to defend the human aspect of the Church, Möhler heavily relied on Enlightenment sociology which conceived human society as a conglomeration of individuals with a common goal.<sup>20</sup> The notion of the Church outlined by Möhler in the early years of his career as a theologian appeared in *Kirchenrechtliche Vorlesungen*:

The concept 'church' comes under the higher concept 'society' and just as the

distinctive character of all other societies lies in the goal which they seek to attain, so the church is essentially a religious society since its aim is the broadening of religious truth and the furthering of holiness and virtue.<sup>21</sup>

The outer aspects of religion are necessary because it is through them that the individual members of the society are inwardly affected. The perfect unity of the Church as a religious society is achieved when the better objective oneness of the Church has become an inner oneness within the individual members who make up the society.<sup>22</sup>

It is by means of outer-inner argument that Möhler defends the primary role of the visible in Catholicism against mainstream Protestant thought. The visible Church as the outer aspect of Christianity is the only means by which its inner aspect, the soul of religion, can work on the individuals. J. R. Geiselman interprets the position of Möhler as follows:

It is true that the Church is not of human origin and that its ultimate aim is interior union of men with God, but once the Church was established, the means by which men reach interior union with God is visible society of the Church. What was originally an inner reality among the early Christians

<sup>20</sup> This is a summary of the opinion given by J.R. Geiselman, a pioneer of research into the Catholic Tübingen School, in the introduction to the 1957 German edition of Johan Adam Möhler's first major work *Die Einheit der Kirche*. Cf. Rosato, "Between Christocentrism and Pneumatocentrism," 47.

<sup>21</sup> Johan Adam Möhler, *Kirchenrechtliche Vorlesungen*, Vol.1, p.1. *Kirchenrechtliche Vorlesungen* translates as Canonical Lectures. I have used the translation by Philip Rosato. See: Rosato, "Between Christocentrism and Pneumatocentrism," 49.

<sup>22</sup> Möhler, *Kirchenrechtliche Vorlesungen*, Vol.3, 3. As quoted in Rosato, "Between Christocentrism and Pneumatocentrism," 49-50.

led to an outer reality which now transmits the divine teaching of Christ to individual members of the society through teachings, rites and institutions.<sup>23</sup>

Authority in the Church plays a chief role of preserving the truth for believers. Thus Möhler's early notion of the Church as a religious society underlines the objective truth of that society's institutions and traditions. These are the means of safeguarding, in a visible form, the central reality of Christ which must steadily ground the interior faith of the individual Christian in the course of history.

Möhler's early effort to affirm the human element in the Church does not present valid arguments for the need of visible structures in a religious society. The purpose of the visible Church is seen solely as the interior perfection of its members. The Church tends to be defined as an ethical association in which the value of the individual members is judged

almost totally in terms of their adherence to laws, which are set down by hierarchical authorities. Geiselman observes that the Church in early Möhler is almost equated with the hierarchy: "the hierarchy and it alone is the Church."<sup>24</sup> However, towards middle of 1824, influenced by the romantic theology of progressive theologians at the University of Tübingen, especially Drey and Sailer, Möhler began to reconcile his thought with the features of romanticism. In the later issues of *Theologische Quartalschrift*, he depicted hierarchical authority as a ministry to serve the Church of love of the community.<sup>25</sup> Gradually, romantic theology dominated his thinking and the result was his first significant work on pneumatocentric ecclesiology, *Die Einheit in Der Kirche*.

## 2.2. The Church as Pneumatocentric: The Romantic Synthesis (1825-1831)

In 1825, Möhler published his first major work,<sup>26</sup> *Die Einheit in der Kirche*<sup>27</sup> and later he explained the reason for writing it as "solely to define the divine element in Christianity."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Taken from Geiselman's introduction to the 1957 German edition of *Die Einheit der Kirche*. Cf. Rosato, "Between Christocentrism and Pneumatocentrism," 50. J.R. Geiselman is considered the first among theologians who made extensive studies on the works of Möhler.

<sup>24</sup> As quoted by Rosato in "Between Christocentrism and Pneumatocentrism," 51.

<sup>25</sup> Möhler, *Theologische Quartalschrift* Vol. IV (1823), 499. Cf. Rosato in "Between Christocentrism and Pneumatocentrism," 54.

<sup>26</sup> Johan Adam Möhler, *Die Einheit in der Kirche oder das Prinzip des Katholicismus dargestellt im Geiste der Kirchenväter der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* (Tübingen, 1825). English translation (1995): *Unity in the Church or the Principle of Catholicism: Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries*, Peter C. Erb, trans., (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1995). The article numbers in the original work are retained in the translation. Hereafter this work will be mentioned as *Einheit* in the text and will be cited as Möhler, *Unity* for the footnotes. For the latter, I will mention the article number in parenthesis and then the page number as usual.

<sup>27</sup> Geiselman comments that Möhler used long titles which would carry the whole meaning of the content. Cf. Herve Savon, *Möhler: The Father of Modern Ecclesiology* (Glen Rock, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1966), 69.

<sup>28</sup> Möhler's introduction to the first edition of *Symbolism* (*Symbolik*), he explained the reason for writing the first work: *Unity*. Cf. Geiselman's edition of *Symbolik*, 12. As quoted in Rosato in "Between Christocentrism and Pneumatocentrism," 54.



According to Geiselman, the book represents a dialectical encounter between the Deistic world left to the human being and the romantic world penetrated by God. It brings into theological dialogue the transcendence of God which is stressed in the former and the immanence of God which characterizes the latter. However, the romantic pole (the interactive notion of God and human beings) dominated the process.<sup>29</sup> Thus Möhler viewed all the external aspects of the Church as flowing from the internal life of the community. He wrote in *Einheit*:

The body of the Church built itself up in a truly organic fashion from the inside to the outside, as the exterior form of the an interior active power, not from the outside to the inside according to the manner in which stones and other inorganic masses are formed, to which beings - devoid of all life, spirit and power - some would compare the Church of God, these theologians seem to be able to find nothing but a lifeless and contingent model by which to explain the Church.<sup>30</sup>

Teaching, cult and institution come to life only after the community of the Church brings them into existence as expressions of interior belief.

The Holy Spirit is conceived as the divine formative principle of the Church, in the sense

that the Holy Spirit unifies the community of believers.<sup>31</sup> Over against the rationalistic concept of Christianity as a society of autonomous individuals, to whom the spirit may come and go, Möhler asserts that the whole Church lives one life in the spirit; each member gives this life to others by the action of the spirit from within him.<sup>32</sup> "The visible Church does not form the individual believer, but the community of the believers, who share the one life of the spirit, are the ones who form others and thus build up the Church."<sup>33</sup>

Such a mystical description of the Church does not force Möhler to relegate the visible Church to a merely secondary role. This is the fascinating aspect of his first synthesis. The stress on the presence of the spirit underlines the necessity of the visible Church, for without the latter, the invisible action of the spirit would have no visible embodiment in the world. Like all living organism, the spirit or the life giving principle of the Church, must have a means by which to manifest his existence:

So with the Christian spirit, he would only, if I may use the expression, wander around in doubtful and invisible appearances, without being able to recognize himself as the Christian spirit, and without being able to make himself known to others, because he would have no true existence.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 210; Geiselman, *Einheit und Liebe*, 153.

<sup>30</sup> Möhler, *Unity* (56), 231.

<sup>31</sup> Möhler, *Unity* (1), 81-82.

<sup>32</sup> Möhler, *Unity* (27), 144.

<sup>33</sup> Möhler, *Unity* (49), 212.

<sup>34</sup> Möhler, *Unity* (49), 212-213.

According to Möhler, the visible Church is the community of believers, in whom the spirit not only works, but in whom it actually takes on visible appearance. No individual person or institution can claim that they alone possesses the spirit, for the spirit is the common possession of all those through whose faith, hope and love it takes on visibility. Christians do not individually possess the spirit; rather they commonly share in the same divine life because of the presence of the spirit in them. The visible Church is the symbol of the 'spirit-given love' by which Christians live for the other and with the other.<sup>35</sup> In *Einheit*, Möhler asserts that what is usually associated with the visible Church - teaching office, cult and institution - is the 'somatology'<sup>36</sup> of the Church. But external forms can only come alive through the invisible action of the spirit which is the divine pneumatological principle in the Church. Therefore, somatology is completely dependent on pneumatology. Nothing external can be simply identified with the essence of the Church. The spirit of God alone is the essence of the visible community.

One can see three basic shifts in direction because of Möhler's new-found vision of the pneumatocentric nature of the Church. These include: from the individual to the communal, from the homogenous to the diversified and from the static to the dynamic. The first movement from the individual to the communal is inspired by the romantic desire to escape from the narrow confines of individual existence to the harmonious unity

with others and with the whole universe. When Möhler applies this notion of the Church, he realizes that reconciliation with Christ is:

... at the same time an atonement with all the others who have been reconciled, that is, with the community of the Church; in this unity of our life with the life of all the others who have been reconciled, we become aware of our true reconciliation with Christ for the first time; for in that harmony of the individual life with the universal life... is our union with God.<sup>37</sup>

The spirit of Christ overcomes individual barriers in the Church and makes each individual aware of his/her participation in the life of all those who are reconciled with Christ.

The second shift in Möhler's thought is from a homogenous to a diversified notion of the Church. In *Einheit*, Möhler states that the Church only becomes a living organism when it contains diverse tensions which result from the unique individuality of each member of the community. He observes:

Indeed the whole would cease to be a living being, if the singular life of the individuals, in which the whole consists, were to be lost; precisely through the diverse singularities of the individuals and through their free development and unhindered movement, does the Church become a living organism which flourishes and grows in a marvelous way.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 210.

<sup>36</sup> Somatology here refers to all embodied elements in the Church, taking the human body as an analogy for the Church. The following description will more disclose the dualistic flavor of this approach.

<sup>37</sup> Möhler, *Unity* (31), 153.

<sup>38</sup> Möhler, *Unity* (39), 174.



The third notable shift in *Einheit*, from the static to the dynamic, was perhaps the most important for Möhler's attempt at a thoroughly pneumatocentric vision of the ecclesial community. According to him, Christianity does not establish itself in each age, as though it had no necessary link with what went before it and with what is to come. In Möhler's view, the Church must be seen as the uninterrupted historical community, which bears Christ's legacy of grace and salvation to men and women because of the mystical presence of his spirit as the continuing principle. He further expressed the interrelationship which Christian history creates between the work of Christ and the work of human beings. "Christian history is the eternal plan of God with mankind which *continually* unrolls itself in time, by which God prepares for himself through Christ as a deserving honour and glory, which is brought about by the free homage of man himself."<sup>39</sup>

Through a pneumatocentric approach, Möhler made a radical departure from previous ecclesiological treatises by stressing the invisible and hidden action of the spirit penetrating through the visible facts of the Church's history, so as to incorporate humanity into an ongoing Pentecost. However, Möhler

himself soon went beyond this original pneumatocentric conception of the Church for the sake of an explicitly christocentric model.

### 2.3. The Church as Christocentric: The Incarnational Synthesis (1831-1838)

In *Symbolik*<sup>40</sup> (1831), Möhler achieves his final theological synthesis by introducing categories of Christology into ecclesiology. The earlier writings of Möhler can be characterized as leaning towards Nestorianism by insisting on the human aspects of the Church and pneumatocentrism heading towards Monophysiticism by almost absorbing the human into divine. However, in *Symbolik*, he attempts to situate an ecclesiology between these two extremes by use of an analogy with the hypostatic union.<sup>41</sup> In other words, Möhler believed that he overemphasized the divine element in the Church almost to the exclusion of the human in *Einheit*. He became convinced that the Church was not involved into a ceaseless evolution into a void; rather it is caught up in an endless renovation of its fundamental relationship to the historical person of Christ. Through his spirit, Christ brings us back to the fullness of the beginning. Thus Möhler tries to surpass the subjectivism in *Einheit* and link

<sup>39</sup> It was in his 1839 work of *Eileitung in die Kirchengeschichte* that Möhler expressed this interrelationship. As quoted by Rosato in "Between Christocentrism and Pneumatocentrism," 59. (Italics mine).

<sup>40</sup> Johan Adam Möhler, *Symbolik, oder Darstellung der dogmatischen Gegensätze der Katholiken. Protestanten nach ihren öffentlichen Bekenntnisschriften* (Mainz, 1832; 8th ed., 1871-1872; Eng. trans. by S. B. Robertson, 1843 *Symbolism or Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced by their Symbolic Traditions* (London: Gibbings, 1906). There were five editions of this work by Möhler. The present translation is based on the fifth edition of 1906. The article numbers in the original work are retained in the translation. Hereafter this work will be cited as Möhler, *Symbolism*, and in this case too I will mention article number in parenthesis and then the page number as usual.

<sup>41</sup> Möhler, *Symbolism* (28), 259; Cf. Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 212; Geiselman, *Einheit und Liebe*, 192.

the experience of the individual Christian to the external objective truth of Christ as it is preserved and taught in the Church.<sup>42</sup> This led to the analogy between the Church and hypostatic union:

The visible Church is the son of God as he *continually* appears in human form among men, as he renews himself steadily, as he rejuvenates himself eternally; the Church is the *continuing incarnation* ...of the son of God; just like the whole Church, the faithful are called in the Scriptures the Body of Christ.<sup>43</sup>

According to Hans Kung, Möhler is making a comparison between the Church and the incarnate Christ, not an identification of Christ with the Church. However, Möhler intends to show that the Church is like Christ himself, in that it consists of both a divine and a human component.<sup>44</sup> What Möhler was trying to achieve was a dialectical relation between the visible and the invisible as well as between the human and the divine in the Church. In order to demonstrate this dialectic, he stated that human freedom, which is so essential to the Christian community, must be seen in connection with the continual action of Christ in the sphere of the Church through his spirit.<sup>45</sup>

According to *Symbolik*, Christ works in the Church in two ways: though all of his work is invisible, one aspect of his work is subjective

and the other is objective. He works subjectively by sharing his life with believers through his spirit and he works objectively by preserving the gifts of revelation in the teaching authority, cult and institutions of the visible Church. Therefore, for Christ's subjective and objective ways of working in the Church to be intimately united, it is necessary that the interior subjectivity of the individual be in conformity with the objective criteria of truth which are found in the visible Church. Thus the subjective unity with Christ implies objective unity with the visible Church.<sup>46</sup> Christ is 'continued' and remains in the Church by his hidden work in all elements of the community and therefore, the members have to recognize his presence in the Church and come to unity.

The meaning of the continuing incarnation of Christ in the Church can be expressed in the following two ways. (1) Möhler has been wrestling from the beginning of his career as a theologian with the connection between the divine and the human aspects of the Church. At first he seemed to say that the Church was predominantly a human institution. In *Einheit*, he appeared to maintain that the body of Christ was so caught up in the spirit as to be almost divine. Here he derives insight from the christological controversies of the first three centuries to describe the two aspects of the Church in a balanced and undistorted way: the hypostatic

<sup>42</sup> Henry Raphael Nienaltowski, *Möhler's Theory of Doctrinal Development: Its Genesis and Formulation* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1959), 42-44.

<sup>43</sup> Möhler, *Symbolism* (36), 259 (Italics mine).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Hans Kung, *The Church* (London: Burns and Oates, 1967), 240.

<sup>45</sup> Möhler, *Symbolism* (37), 265.

<sup>46</sup> Möhler, *Symbolism* (37), 265-266.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 276.



union. This cannot be interpreted to mean that the Church is Christ.<sup>47</sup> The only proper conclusion seems to be that Möhler was making an analogous statement when he alluded to the Church as the ‘continuing incarnation.’ (2) When Möhler uses the words, ‘continuing’, ‘is being continued’ and ‘remaining,’ he does not mean that Christ is to be identified with any particular form of the Church at any period in its development. Rather he insists that Christ works through the visible institution of the Church as well as through individuals. The idea is that the truth of the beginning is present at each moment of the Church’s history, so that the community can always be in touch with the fullness of its origin.<sup>48</sup> In other words, in the *historicality*<sup>49</sup> of the Church, the eternal plan of God leads all things back to the newness of their origin in Christ at each point in time.

### 3. The Significance of Möhler’s Theology for Modern Ecclesiology

How is Möhler’s ecclesiology relevant for us today? Yves Congar proposes two reasons for the relevance of Möhler. In the first place, Möhler was able to transcend an ecclesiology which was mechanical and juridical. “His thought could open (re-open) a truly theological or incarnational theology ...

beyond the treatises of ecclesiology done in terms of papal *potestas* or apologetics.”<sup>50</sup> In the second place, Möhler is extremely significant because of his supposed ecumenical intentions. In his writings, he demonstrated a real confrontation with Protestantism and this conviction has become an ongoing theme in recent interpretations of *Symbolik*.<sup>51</sup> The remarkable characteristics of his theological and ecumenical contribution shall be elaborated in the following categories.

#### 3.1. An Ecclesiology beyond the Bellarmine Juridicism

Renewing the Church in modern times means leaving behind the negative aspects of centralization made visible in medieval hierarchies. For some time, such an administrative style and thinking had been absorbed into one teaching office whose language and conceptuality were kept captive in a mélange of canon law.<sup>52</sup> Möhler dared to think differently and was ready to challenge this institutional and hierarchical juridicism with the courage of enlightenment, with the passion of romanticism and with the principles of idealism. In the theological perspective proposed by Möhler, the formation of the Church is seen as the consequence of the mission of the Holy Spirit. The ideal transition

<sup>48</sup> Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 288.

<sup>49</sup> Here I use ‘historicality,’ a Heideggerian term, to emphasize the temporal manifestation of the eternal reality in history.

<sup>50</sup> As quoted in Thomas F. O’Meara, “Beyond Hierarchology: Johann Adam Möhler and Yves Congar” in Donald J. Dietrich and Michael J. Himes (eds), *The Legacy of the Tübingen School* (New York: The Cross Road Publishing Company, 1997), 182.

<sup>51</sup> Antony Van Harskamp, “The Authority of the Church and the Problematic Nature of Modern Subjectivity in Johann Möhler’s *Symbolik*,” in Dietrich and Himes, *The Legacy of the Tübingen School*, 193.

<sup>52</sup> O’Meara, “Beyond Hierarchology,” 182.

towards a theological ecclesiology began with the publication of *Einheit*.

### 3.2. From a Pyramidal Model to an Elliptical Model

Instead of a static ecclesiological paradigm which is primarily juridical and externalist, Möhler developed an organic, tension-filled conception of the Church as an ongoing 'pneumato-genesis,' a living continuation of the Pentecostal event by which the spirit of Christ permanently vitalizes his body, the Church, and draws its members into an intimate relationship with the glorified son of God. Central to this new conception of the Church is the bipolar structure which undergirds it. One focus is the objective foundation of the Church in the incarnation and glorification of Christ at a specific point in time; the other is the subjective appropriation of these events as they are present to humanity in the visible elements of the Church. The ellipse which is drawn around these two foci is the work of the Holy Spirit, the animating principle of Christ and the Church. Christian history brings about a synthesis of these two central moments of past and present, which must be kept in perpetual tension.<sup>53</sup> The members of Christ's body are to realize, in time, through the work of the transcendent spirit, a free acceptance of the Father's gratuitous presence to the world in the incarnation of his son. Indeed, it was not a destruction of the pyramid (the institutional

Church) by Möhler but rather its reconstruction on the permanent foundations of Christian mysteries for its historical mission.

### 3.3. The Rediscovery of Mystical Body of Christ

The progression from the diluted idea of the Church as a religious society to the rediscovery of the notion of the Mystical Body of Christ in *Symbolik* was a historical breakthrough. Although Möhler was only appropriating the 'body' concept from the Pauline writings and from the early Church fathers, its re-introduction brought forth an organic notion to the hitherto inorganic institutionalized notion of the Church.<sup>54</sup> It offered a positive apologetic based on Church history and an evolutionary understanding of Christianity, thus producing an unusually profound defense of the organic development of Catholicism.

### 3.4. The Manifold Implications of Organic Evolution

The Church which exists in time, constitutes a living consciousness that develops and resolves the challenges of historical contingencies. The internal force that drives this organic evolution is not reducible to a form of human self-consciousness. For Möhler, this internal force comes ultimately from the Trinity - from Christ's incarnation continued in history through the power of the Holy Spirit. According to him, the Church is Christ acting

<sup>53</sup> Bradford E. Hinze, "The Holy Spirit and the Catholic Tradition" in Dietrich and Himes, *The Legacy of the Tübingen School*, 88-93.

<sup>54</sup> Harskamp, "The Authority of the Church," 194-196.

<sup>55</sup> Stephen Fields, "Doctrine as Symbol: Johann Adam Möhler in Dialogue with Kant and Hegel," in Dietrich and Himes, *The Legacy of the Tübingen School*, 131.



and manifesting itself through ages; the Church represents his permanent incarnation.<sup>55</sup> The Church as an organism retains its identity through successive resolutions of crises, institutions, doctrines etc., which constitute its empirical manifestations. The organic evolution of visible manifestations is derived from an internal force that must actively respond to the external exigencies. In this way, the alterations in the ministry and nature of the Church are conditioned by the internal invisible force which dynamically appropriates the Church to the needs of the time. This notion of organic evolution thus calls for openness to the spirit and a readiness for change to the varying circumstances of the world for authentic manifestations of the divine. Acceptance of such an evolution can dilute the rigidity to conform to the existing manifestations of the Church and can legitimize the initiatives to reform the Church time and again, creatively responding to the signs of the time, as divine will. Such an attitude of *ecclesia semper reformanda* can easily consider and accommodate proposed changes to the externalities of the Church.

### 3.5. The Dialectical Method for Openness and Creativity

Möhlér's intellectual approach was characterized by openness and creativity and was essentially dialectical. It sought to avoid the extremes of centralization or individualism, objectivity or subjectivity, transcendent or immanent and institution or communion. The

paradoxes of ascending and descending ecclesiology, visible and invisible Church were accommodated in his theories and thoughts. The shifts in his theology were attempts to abstain from cornering ecclesiology into a single stance from which it could not display its essential complexity. Rather than opting simply for christocentrism over pneumatocentrism (for the already over the not yet), Möhlér kept these extremes in tension, so that Jesus Christ could continually be recognized as a living presence in the Church. His was "a dialectical approach of mediated polarization and interaction between the outward and inward aspects."<sup>56</sup>

Although Möhlér stressed christocentrism in his final synthesis, he accommodated the definitive role of the Holy Spirit. He was ready to entertain new questions, to wrestle with the contemporary problematic and to redefine Catholicism: although the same thing was being said, something different was also being added.<sup>57</sup> There were five editions of *Symbolik* within two years after its publication, each one with significant changes. This readiness to revise shows that Möhlér not only understood tradition, but was willing to move the truths of the past into a new context, which would inevitably preserve them in modifying them. By letting himself be led from one extreme to the other, he was not being unfaithful to the Catholic tradition, but was developing a theological method, which has ultimately proved itself to have been most applicable to and fruitful for the needs of the Church.

<sup>56</sup> Nienaltowski, *Möhlér's Theory of Doctrinal Development*, 78.

<sup>57</sup> Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 326-327.

### 3.6. Implications for Ecumenism and Interfaith Dialogue

Möhler's pneumatic theology has proved very influential in preparing Catholicism for its unprecedented ecumenical and inter-religious openness and for the eventual recognition at Vatican II of the ecclesial character of non-Catholic communities. The reason for the high esteem given to *Einheit* is that it afforded Catholicism the necessary pneumatocentric balance which could offset rigidity of the institutional model, permit openness to a more explicitly Biblical understanding of the Church as a living community, hence enabling both the visible and the invisible components of Catholicism to be brought into a sacramental synthesis. That Möhler could channel positive historical research towards serving a liberating rather than restricting factor for the future of ecclesiology is the greatest tribute to his creative spirit.<sup>58</sup> The Vatican II document on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (UR), makes direct references to the pneumatological and Christological necessities of Church unity (Cf. UR 1, 2&4) as expounded in *Einheit* 49 and *Symbolik* 39 respectively. In *Unitatis Redintegratio* we read:

"There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one Baptism" (Eph. 4, 4-5). For "all you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ ... for you are all

one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3, 27-28). *It is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe ... brings them into intimate union with Christ*, so that He is the principle of the Church's unity (UR 2).<sup>59</sup>

The soteriological role of the Holy Spirit delineated in *Einheit* 42-49<sup>60</sup> and the exposition of the universal salvific effects of the incarnation of the word in *Symbolik* 35-39<sup>61</sup> are reflected in Vatican II documents - *Gaudium et Spes* (GS); *Ad Gentes* (AG); *Lumen Gentium* (LG) and *Nostra Aetate* (NA) and in post-Vatican II documents - *Redemptoris Missio* (RM); *Redemptor Hominis* (RM); *Dominum et Vivificantem* (DV) and *Dialogue and Proclamation* (DP). They attributed these values to the active presence of God through his word, pointing also to the universal action of the spirit. "For, by his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man" (GS 22). *Ad Gentes* confirms, "...without doubt, the Holy Spirit was at work in the world before Christ was glorified" (AG 4). From this it can be seen that these elements, as a preparation for the Gospel (LG 16), have played and do still play a providential role in the divine economy of salvation. This recognition impels the Church to enter into "dialogue and collaboration" (NA 2; GS 92-93). Pope John Paul II affirmed the workings of the spirit of God among people of other religions, not only in the hearts of individuals but also in some of their religious rites (RM 55), holding that God can give his grace outside the visible boundaries of the Church

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Gregory Baum, "The Ecclesial Reality of the Other Churches," *Concilium* 4 (1965), 66.

<sup>59</sup> What is given in italics is given as such in *Einheit* (Unity) 49.

<sup>60</sup> Möhler, *Unity* (42-49), 184-213.

<sup>61</sup> Möhler, *Symbolism* (35-39), 249-288.



(RH 10). He referred to the universal action of the spirit, affecting “not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions” (DV 12). Through dialogue, the Church seeks to uncover the ‘seeds of the word’ (AG 11&15), a ‘ray of that truth which enlightens all men’ (NA 2); these are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of humankind. Dialogue is based on hope and love, and will bear fruit in the spirit. In *Dialogue and Proclamation*, the pneumatic and christic notions of unity are explicitly mentioned: “other religions ....stimulate the Church both to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ’s presence and the working of the spirit, as well as ...to bear witness to the fullness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all” (DP 12).

It would be naïve to say that Möhler supplied the necessary resources to shape the ecumenical and inter-religious attitudes of the Catholic Church at Vatican II. One cannot but acknowledge the fact that Möhler is the revivalist of pneumatological and christological foundations of the Church which in fact facilitated the shaping of modern ecclesiology.<sup>62</sup> It should also be noted that in 1825, more than a century before Vatican II, through his essay titled ‘On the Salvation of the Pagans,’ Möhler proposed an inclusive theology of religions<sup>63</sup> which later formed Appendix 4 of *Einheit*.

### 3.7. A Vital Source for Vatican II Ecclesiology

Although all of Möhler’s works were published in German before Vatican I (1869-70), the Council was uninfluenced by his writings. The encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* (1943) of Pope Pius XII is influenced by both Möhler’s *Einheit* and *Symbolik* in presenting the Biblical notion of the Body of Christ as an analogy for the Church; this became an important dimension of the Church in the Vatican II dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*.<sup>64</sup> Richard P. McBrien has explained the role of Möhler in shaping the content of the ecclesiology of Yves Congar who was behind the doctrinal formulations of *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*.<sup>65</sup> The pneumatocentric and the incarnational paradigms given by Möhler treated the Church as a living tradition and as an organic unity. These notions paved the way for the further development of modern ecclesiology, especially that of communion ecclesiology. Thus Möhler is known as the revivalist of communion ecclesiology through Vatican II.<sup>66</sup>

In Möhler’s works we have encountered many contemporary versions of communion ecclesiology interpreted by Vatican II. In recent times, these notions had

<sup>62</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Image Books, 1987), 31-70.

<sup>63</sup> Möhler, *Unity* (Appendix 4), 355-358. Originally it was part of *Theologische Quartalschrift*. “Jesus is the individual from whom all truth that is found in the pagan world came... all those who lived rightly bore in them a desire for the redeemer and are saved by Him” 355-356.

<sup>64</sup> Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 311-312.

<sup>65</sup> Richard P. McBrien, *The Church: Evolution of Catholicism* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 88.

<sup>66</sup> Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books), 24.

been systematically theoretized by Henry De Lubac, Hans Kung, Karl Rahner and Avery Dulles.<sup>67</sup> Maureen Sullivan calls Möhler the pivotal figure of Vatican II ecclesiology and depicts Congar and Pius XII as the bridge builders from Tübingen to Vatican, in developing newer ecclesiological paradigms which future theologians could build upon.<sup>68</sup>

### 3.8. The Power of the Symbols and Limits of the Paradigms

In the genesis of his ecclesiology, Möhler gradually passed through what Avery Dulles has described as four models of the Church: the institutional, communal, mystical and sacramental.<sup>69</sup> Möhler began his career defending the institutional model of the Church. In *Einheit* he proposed a mystical and communal concept of the Church and in *Symbolik*, a sacramental notion. Möhler realized the inherent limitations of models. The organic model best suits to understand the Church as an ongoing manifestation of Christ historically. But the Church is pre-historic. Möhler was convinced of the limitations of his articulations and was ready to improve his theology in response to new inspirations. Finally, in the second edition of *Symbolik*, he tried to synthesize the pneumatological and christological categories, aware of the limitations of the extremes. Throughout his career, Möhler tried to make theology relevant to the trends of his times; at the same time he

returned to the Biblical and Patristic traditions, in order to be a credible ambassador of the Church.<sup>70</sup> Neither human categories, nor any synthetic methodology can fully contain or confine the mystery of the Church to models and statements. No box can fully encompass the inherent incomprehensible reality of the mystery of the Church. Möhler was very aware of the mystical dimension of the Church wherein Christ and the Holy Spirit are fully present and fully active beyond the capabilities of human comprehension. Hence he finally moved towards symbols and attributed the greatest symbol of God's love (John 3, 16) which is disclosed to humanity through the mystery of incarnation. Hence 'ongoing incarnation' is a symbol *par excellence*, fusing the divine and human elements and accommodating the creative tension between the perennial and the continuing dynamic identities. A similar symbolic approach is reflected in the theology of Karl Rahner which became essential to his concept of 'real symbol'<sup>71</sup> and the foundation for his ecclesiology and sacramentology.

### Conclusion

To conclude, let me reiterate that Möhler is the key Catholic figure in the emergence of ecclesiology as an area of doctrinal study at the beginning of nineteenth century. The fusion of paradoxes of an ecclesiology from below and ecclesiology from above, the synthesis of

<sup>67</sup> Michael J. Daley, *Vatican II: Forty Personal Stories* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 2003), 23.

<sup>68</sup> Maureen Sullivan, *The Road to Vatican II: Key Changes in Theology* (London: Paulist Press, 2007), 22.

<sup>69</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 31-70.

<sup>70</sup> Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 326-27.

<sup>71</sup> Rahner first described his theology of symbol in an essay published in 1959, it was later translated as "On the Theology of Symbol", *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4. (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1961-1976; New York: Seabury, 1974-1976), 221-252.



visible and invisible and of human and divine elements, and the use of an organic metaphor of 'ongoing incarnation' to maintain the balance of inward development and outward expression, are potential contributions to the history of theology.

By restoring the Church to the status of a mystery, Möhler opened the possibility of pluralism of ways in which the Church can be studied while simultaneously incorporating his ecclesiology into the system of mysteries. Möhler's significance does not end with the development of ecclesiology in Vatican II. Instead, his ecclesiology will be a facilitator for a post-Vatican II 'world Christianity' to express itself in newer and more relevant ways to current realities of life, especially through ecumenism and interfaith interactions. The metaphors of 'ongoing incarnation' and 'ongoing pentecost' do challenge the theoretical possibilities of framing models to fit ecclesial existence and experience. Möhler himself has been the example to entertain and accommodate these developments through openness and creativity, by a mediated

polarization and interaction between the outward and inward aspects, and a new dialectic to achieve wholeness. A new *aggiornamento* cannot ignore the vitality of *resourcement*. Möhler knew it very well, when he returned to the Bible and the patristics and appropriated the vibrant idealism and romanticism in approaching the wholeness of the mystery of the Church in its eternal and historical intricacy.

This paper is not conclusive in its findings and proposals. It only attempts to suggest that Möhler has the potential for exploring 'Vatican III' ecclesiology for the global Church of today. There are treasures yet to be unearthed in Möhler. The anthropology of *Athanasius der Gross (Athanasius the Great)* is not sufficiently discussed among the scholars. It is my hope that a Christian anthropocentric approach to ecclesiology will give a new soteriological dynamism to the 'ongoing incarnation.' As a result, new dimensions of Church's self understanding (*ad intra*) and self expression (*ad extra*) may emerge for the future.



# The Blessed Passion of Holy Love

## A Textual Study Based on *Centuriae de Caritate* of Maximus the Confessor

Roselin SST

“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (I Jn 4, 16). The aim of Christian life, Deification or Divinization, is summed up in these words. It is nothing less than the achievement of the state of perfect love. Maximus the Confessor’s *Centuriae de Caritate* -Centuries on Love- describe in four sets of centuries the way to this state of perfect love. For Maximus, training in Christian life is a training in Love.<sup>1</sup> Here in this short paper we are analyzing “the virtue”, love, based on Maximus the Confessor’s great work *Centuriae de Caritate*.

### 1. The Author

Maximus the Confessor (580-662) was a monk at the monastery of Philippikos in Chrysopolis. In 626 during the Persian invasion he fled to Africa. From 633-644 he played a leading role in opposing the heresies of Monoenergism and Monotheletism. For this

reason he was arrested in 653 and brought to Constantinople for trial. There he was sent into exile. After many trials and condemnation, in 662 at Constantinople he was flogged, his tongue was cut out and his right hand was chopped off. He himself became a living confession of faith, and for this reason he was given the name ‘Confessor’. He died soon afterwards on August 13, 662.<sup>2</sup> His memory is observed in the Orthodox Church on 21 January.

In his writings he insists upon the close link between dogma and prayer. He discusses almost all the aspects of Christian truth, including the interpretation of Scripture, the doctrine of the incarnation, ascetic practice and the Divine Liturgy<sup>3</sup>. He is the writer assigned the largest space in the *Philokalia* which contains four works under his name:

1. Four Hundred texts on love (*Centuriae de Caritate*).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. LOUTH Andrew, *Maximus the Confessor*, London, Routledge, 1996, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. PAULINE Allen-NEIL Bronwen(eds.&trs.), *Maximus the Confessor and his Companions. Documents from Exile*, New York, Oxford university Press Inc., 2002, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. PALMER G.E.H(et.al.), *Philokalia vol:2*, Faber and Faber, London- Boston, 1981, 48.

<sup>4</sup> Hereafter *De Car.* Cf. PALMER G.E.H(et.al.), *Philokalia*, 52-113. (The critical edition of the Greek text A. Cereasa-Gastaldo (Verba Seniorum, N.S. 3: Rome, 1963). This work is depended on the text in *Philokalia*.

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2. Two Hundred Texts on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation of the Son of God<sup>5</sup>
3. Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice (500 in number)<sup>6</sup>
4. On the Lord's Prayer<sup>7</sup>

## 2. *Centuriae de Caritate*

This is the most attractive of Maximus' ascetical writings. It presents the Christian life as a constant endeavour of purification of love. Maximus makes it clear that, the human being in its integrity, including the body and the rational parts of the soul, is united in loving union with God. The perfection of this union is the goal of Christian life<sup>8</sup>. This enriching work handles the theological virtue of charity in a detailed but simple way. It contains four centuries mainly on love. Both the number 100 and the number of the centuries 4 are significant. The number 100 is a perfect number, referring directly to the one God, the other number 4, represents the four Gospels<sup>9</sup>, which present love as a commandment.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.1 Aim of the Author

Maximus sent these centuries to one of his friends, a priest named Elpidios<sup>11</sup>. In the preface to the work very briefly but clearly he

introduces these centuries to him. He admits that these chapters are not the product of his original thought. He collected them from the writings of the Holy Fathers and condensed them into short paragraphs in order to make it easy to remember and to assimilate them.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.2 Instructions for Reading

Since the subject matter of this work is Love which is God Himself, Maximus in the preface to Elpidios gives some instructions for approaching the centuries. They are not meant for easy reading.

- Read them with sympathy
- Seek only what is profitable in them
- Do not be annoyed by what is written
- Give careful attention to each chapter
- Not all the chapters are easy for everyone to understand
- Many of them will need to be studied closely by most readers even if they seem to be very simple
- If anything in these chapters should prove useful to the soul, it will be revealed to the reader by the grace of God, provided that he reads not out of curiosity, but in the fear and love of God
- If a man reads them not for spiritual benefit, but to find material with which to

<sup>5</sup> Cf. PALMER G.E.H(et.al.), *Philokalia* 114-163.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. PALMER G.E.H(et.al.), *Philokalia* 164-284.

<sup>7</sup> PALMER G.E.H(et.al.), *Philokalia* 285-305.

<sup>8</sup> BERARDINO DI Angelo (ed.), Walford Adrian (trs.), *Patrology. Eastern Fathers from the Council of Chalcedon(451) to John of Damascus(750)*, Cambridge, James Clarke & Co Ltd, 2008, 138.

<sup>9</sup> PALMER G.E.H(et.al.), *Philokalia*, 52.

<sup>10</sup> MAXIMUS Confessor, *The Ascetic Life: The Four Centuries on Charity*, New Jersey, The New Man press, 1955, 102.

<sup>11</sup> PALMER G.E.H(et.al.), *Philokalia*, 52.

<sup>12</sup> PALMER G.E.H(et.al.), *Philokalia*, 52.

abuse the Author, so that in his conceit he can show himself to be the more learned, nothing profitable will be revealed to him anywhere.<sup>13</sup>

Maximus emphasizes that the text must be approached with reverence if its content is to be understood. The attitude of curiosity necessary for studying a scientific subject, will achieve nothing.

### 3. The Blessed Passion of Holy Love

In general we can say that the *Centuriae de Caritate* deal with the subject of love in terms of the blessed Passion<sup>14</sup>. Though in practice Maximus deals with a number of themes under this heading and presents his teaching in scattered form he nevertheless succeed conveying that men's ultimate goal is the achievement of perfect love nothing but Deification.

The doctrine of love in western Christianity took its shape in an Augustinian framework. In Maximus we can see the typical eastern approach which presents love in relational terms. In the *Centuriae* he speaks about the inter-relatedness of love of God, love of one self and love of others.<sup>15</sup>

#### 3.1 What is love?

Maximus does not provide a hard and fast definition for Love. Instead he tries to

communicate a comprehensive vision. Love is presented as a holy state of the soul<sup>16</sup> that values knowledge of God above all created things.<sup>17</sup> The person who has true love has become a transformed being. Maximus tries to describe love in terms of the various levels of this transformation.

#### 3.1.1 Love: A State of Harmony of Virtues

Love cannot stand by itself. It is the sum total of many other virtues, i.e. 'the virtue'. Maximus explains it very beautifully.

Dispassion engenders love, hope in God engenders dispassion, and patience and forbearance engender hope in God; these in turn are the product of complete self-control, which itself springs from fear of God. Fear of God is the result of faith in God<sup>18</sup>.

If you have faith in the Lord you will fear punishment, and this fear will lead you to control the passions. Once you control the passions you will accept affliction patiently, and through such acceptance you will acquire hope in God. Hope in God separates the intellect from every worldly attachment, and when the intellect is detached in this way it will acquire love for God<sup>19</sup>.

#### 3.1.2 Love: A State of Detachment

According to Maximus true love can be found only with regard to God. The person

<sup>13</sup> PALMER G.E.H(et.al.), *Philokalia* 52.

<sup>14</sup> *De Car.* III.67.

<sup>15</sup> CARMICHAEL Liz, *Friendship. Interpreting Christian Love*, New York, T&T Clark International, 2004, 68.

<sup>16</sup> *De Car.* I.1.

<sup>17</sup> *De Car.* I.1.

<sup>18</sup> *De Car.* I.2.

<sup>19</sup> *De Car.* I.3.

who has true love must be detached from everything other than God. In order to have its lasting possession we must detach ourselves from everything in this world.

### 3.1.2.1 Detachment from Created Things

Everything that exists was made by God and for God. God is superior to every created thing. Therefore he who devotes himself to created things is a worshiper of idols.<sup>20</sup> In true love, the intellect experiences a kind of detachment from the created things. The light of spiritual knowledge is the life of the intellect. This light is engendered by love of God. Intellect senses the fact that nothing is greater than divine love and in this intense love for God goes out of itself. Unconscious of itself or of any created things it is illuminated by the infinite light of God. Just as our eyes become insensible to the stars when Sun rises the intellect becomes insensible to created beings.<sup>21</sup> It becomes aware instead of God's infinity and its own lowliness just as happened in the case of Isaiah (Is. 6).

### 3.1.2.2 Detachment from One's Own Body

Someone who has true Love goes a step further. He detaches himself from his own body. The soul is nobler than the body just as the Creator is nobler than the creation. When the intellect is focused on love of God the person will pay little attention to visible things and regard his own body as something alien.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *De Car.* I.7.

<sup>21</sup> *De Car.* I.10.

<sup>22</sup> *De Car.* I.6.

<sup>23</sup> *De Car.* I.16.

<sup>24</sup> *De Car.* I.17.

<sup>25</sup> *De Car.* II.9.

### 3.1.3 Love: The Observance of God's Commandment

The person who loves God can love everyone as himself. The person who has any trace of hatred in his heart is utterly estranged from love for God. Maximus explains the reason for this by quoting from St. John's Gospel. He who loves me, says the Lord, 'will keep my commandments' (cf. John 14:15, 23); and 'this is my commandment, that you love one another' (John 15:12). Thus he who does not love his neighbour fails to keep the commandment, and so cannot love the Lord.<sup>23</sup> Blessed is he who can love all men equally<sup>24</sup>.

#### 3.1.3.1 The Reasons for Loving One Another

Men love one another mainly for five reasons.

- for the sake of God- as the virtuous man loves everyone and the man not yet virtuous loves the virtuous
- by nature-as parents love their children and children their parents
- because of self esteem- as he who is praised loves the man who praises him
- because of avarice- one who loves a rich man for what he can get out of him
- because of self-indulgence-as the man who serves his belly and his genitals

The first of these is commendable, the second is of an intermediate kind, the other forms of love are dominated by passions.<sup>25</sup>



There can also be a neutral stage in love, where me relates to the another person without loving or without hating him.<sup>26</sup>

If we were to observe God's commandments we cannot neglect our brethren. All the law and the prophets are contained in the commandments of love for God and love for one another contain (Matt. 22:40). The whole purpose of the Savior's commandments is to free the intellect from dissipation and hatred, and to lead it to the love of Him and one's neighbor. From this love springs the light of active holy knowledge.<sup>27</sup> One should love every man from the soul, but one should place one's hope only in God and serve Him with all one's strength.<sup>28</sup> As long as God protects us against harm, all our friends treat us with respect and all our enemies are powerless to injure us. But once He abandons us, all our friends turn away from us while all our enemies prevail against us.<sup>29</sup> We all experience at least once in our life the bitterness of God's abandonment. Maximus presents that experience focusing on its salvific values.

He pointed out four principal ways in which God abandons us.

1. The way of divine dispensation-through our apparent abandonment others who are abandoned may be saved. E.g. Our Lord (Mat. 27,46).

2. The way of trial and testing-E.g. Job and Joseph- through it Job is made a pillar of courage and Joseph a pillar of self-restraint.
3. The way of fatherly correction-E.g. St.Paul 2 Cor. 12,7).
4. The way of rejection- E.g. Jews, so that by being punished they might be brought to repentance.

These are all ways of salvation filled with divine blessing and wisdom.<sup>30</sup>

Only those who keep the commandments and are true initiates into divine justice can understand the mystery of this abandonment and can stand at the side of their brethren when God permits them to be put to the test. Being a faithful friend is demanding.

A faithful friend is a strong defence' (Eccles. 6:14); for when things are going well with you, he is a good counsellor and a sympathetic collaborator, while when things are going badly; he is the truest of helpers and a most compassionate supporter.<sup>31</sup>

In scripture the virtues are called the 'ways'. The greatest of all the virtues is love. But it is not easy to walk along this way. Disgrace, injury, recrimination on account of one's faith or manner of life, beatings, physical assault etc. are things that dissolve love, whether they happen to oneself or to one's relatives or friends. He whose love weakens in such

<sup>26</sup> *De Car.* II.50.

<sup>27</sup> *De Car.* II.56.

<sup>28</sup> *De Car.* IV.95.

<sup>29</sup> *De Car.* IV.95.

<sup>30</sup> *De Car.* IV.96.

<sup>31</sup> *De Car.* IV.99.

circumstances has not yet understood the purpose of Christ's commandments<sup>32</sup> and not yet experienced the holy state of perfect love.

### 3.1.3.2 Love for the Transitory Things: An Obstacle to Love of One Another

The real reason for the hostility to our neighbor is nothing but the preference of material things over and above the commandment of love. There are three reasons for this love of material things.

- **Self-indulgence**-the self-indulgent person loves wealth because it enables him to live comfortably.
- **Self-esteem**- the person with too much self esteem loves wealth because through it he can gain the esteem of others.
- **Lack of faith**-the person who lacks faith loves wealth because he is afraid of starvation, old age, disease, or exile. He can save the wealth and hoard it. He put his trust in wealth rather than in God.

There is also another type of person who hoards wealth for a good purpose; the **treasurer or bursar**. He collects it to supply the needs of the poor.

The centuries speak at length about love for the brethren. The fourth century identifies four factors that alienate us from the love of our friends.

- Envy or being envied
- Causing or receiving harm

- Insulting or being insulted
- Suspicious thoughts

Sometimes the devil may arouse feeling of hatred in us to the extent of judging the brother wicked whom yesterday we considered virtuous. We have to be patient in this situation and wait until the cloud has passed. We need to examine of our conscience to see whether it is our fault that our brother is still hostile.<sup>33</sup> In times of peaceful relations we do not recall what was said by a brother in a moment of bad feeling.<sup>34</sup> If our brother is still not ready to live peaceably with us, we need to pray for him sincerely and not abuse him to anybody.<sup>35</sup>

### 3.1.3.3 Manifestation of Love

Love is not something to be kept in our heart. It should be revealed in our actions. Maximus the Confessor identifies three ways of manifesting our love for the other. According to him love can be expressed

- By forbearance and patience towards our neighbor
- By genuinely desiring our neighbor's good
- By the right use of material things<sup>36</sup>

### 3.1.3.4 Alienation from Love

The life of love is not as easy to fulfill as it is to describe. The call to love one another is challenging and occasions we fail. Our author points several reasons for our alienation from love<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *De Car.* IV.81.

<sup>33</sup> *De Car.* IV.33.

<sup>34</sup> *De Car.* IV.34.

<sup>35</sup> *De Car.* IV.35.

<sup>36</sup> *De Car.* I.40.

<sup>37</sup> *De Car.* I.55.

1. He who is jealous of his brother ....is surely alienating himself from love
2. He who speaks evil of his brother
3. He who judges his brother
4. He who speaks evil of the law and judges the law<sup>38</sup>
5. He who listens gleefully to gossip at his neighbor's expense
6. He who chatter to a person who likes finding fault<sup>39</sup>

His list is not complete. There may of course be many other reasons. But it should be remembered that in a Christian context alienation from love is an existential problem, preventing us from achieving the ultimate aim of human life.

### 3.1.4 Love: The Requirement for Salvation

One who is alienated from love is alienated from God, for God is Love. Faith in Christ is not by itself sufficient for salvation, unless we learn to love Him through our actions. The devils also believe and tremble.

### 3.1.5 Love: The Way to Deification

The person who loves God starts to be like God. He can love his neighbour as himself. He distributes everything which he has, to everyone in need. In his attitude he tries to receive the attitude of God. Without discriminating between the wicked and the virtuous, the just and the unjust, he gives equally

to all according to their need. Maximus explains clearly this deified state of man:

God, who is by nature good and dispassionate, loves all men equally as His handiwork. But He glorifies the virtuous man because in his will he is united to God. At the same time, in His goodness He is merciful to the sinner and by chastising him in this life brings him back to the path of virtue. Similarly, a man of good and dispassionate judgment also loves all men equally. He loves the virtuous man because of his nature and the probity of his intention; and he loves the sinner, too, because of his nature and because in his compassion he pities him for foolishly stumbling in darkness.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.1.6 Love: An Edifying Virtue

As St. Paul remarks, knowledge puffs up, but love edifies (1 Cor. 8:1). When love is united with knowledge one becomes free from all arrogance. As a result one can become a spiritual builder edifying oneself and all who draw near. Love edifies because it does not envy or feel any bitterness towards those who are envious. Without pretence it confesses its ignorance of what it does not know. Thus it frees the intellect from arrogance and always equips it to advance in knowledge.<sup>41</sup> The same teaching can be found in 1 Cor. 13.

## 3.2 The Transformed State of a True Lover

He who renounce worldly things and lovingly and sincerely serves God and his

<sup>38</sup> *De Car.* I.57.

<sup>39</sup> *De Car.* I.58.

<sup>40</sup> *De Car.* I.25.

<sup>41</sup> *De Car.* IV.60-61.



neighbor is soon set free from every passion and made a partaker of God's love and knowledge. One who has love of God in his heart

- Is tireless in his pursuit of the Lord
- Bears every hardship
- Bears reproach and insult nobly
- Never thinks evil of anyone.<sup>42</sup>
- Is neither distressed himself nor with anyone else on account of transitory thing
- Suffers only one kind of distress which he inflicts on others too...the salutary distress which St. Paul suffered (2Cor. 7: 8-11)<sup>43</sup>
- Lives the angelic life on earth...fasts, keeps vigil, prays, sings psalms, always thinks good of everyone<sup>44</sup>
- Is not swept hither and thither by the demon of self esteem<sup>45</sup>
- Receives divine knowledge energized by love
- Becomes humble and recognizes like Abraham: 'I am dust and ashes' (Gen. 18:17)<sup>46</sup>
- Loves all men equally and show love to all equally<sup>47</sup>
- Prays without distraction<sup>48</sup>

- Puts to death whatever is earthy in himself such as unchastity, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed.<sup>49</sup>
- Is indifferent to both fame and dishonor, riches and poverty, pleasure and distress, life and death<sup>50</sup>

One's state true love is also apparent in his external activities. He becomes a man of charity. He is ever ready to give money and spiritual counsel to those who are in need.<sup>51</sup>

### 3.3 The Conditions that bear fruit in Love

According to Maximus both negative and positive praxis are needed to achieve the perfect state of love. There should constantly strive to eliminate the roots of vice within us. But that is not enough. A fervent attempt must also be made deliberately to practise virtue. The peace of God will descend and infuse love, when one :

- Stops defiling the flesh with shameful deeds
- Stops polluting the soul with wicked thoughts

At the same time the sanctifying gift of self restraint descends and imparts love when one

- Afflict the flesh with hunger and vigils
- Applies oneself tirelessly to psalmody and prayer<sup>52</sup>

<sup>42</sup> *De Car.* I.28.

<sup>43</sup> *De Car.* I.41.

<sup>44</sup> *De Car.* I.42.

<sup>45</sup> *De Car.* I.46.

<sup>46</sup> *De Car.* I.47.

<sup>47</sup> *De Car.* I.71.

<sup>48</sup> *De Car.* II.1.

<sup>49</sup> *De Car.* I.83.

<sup>50</sup> *De Car.* I.73.

<sup>51</sup> *De Car.* I.26.

<sup>52</sup> *De Car.* I.44.

### 3.4 Requirements for Attaining Pure Love

The way to pure love is too far to reach and its gate too narrow to enter. Maximus presents many essential requirements if we are to travel along this road.

#### 1. The Imitation of God

This is described as essential to the achievement of pure love. Imitation is not a matter of something external, but about having the attitude of God. Like God one has to love everyone equally<sup>53</sup> and to free from anger, and irritability.<sup>54</sup> According to Maximus this attitude has a salvific value. It will help ... "to correct the other person by means of your forbearance, so that like a good Father He may bring the two of you under the yoke of love."<sup>55</sup>

#### 2. Endurance of Sufferings<sup>56</sup>

One should not cease loving even if one suffers a thousand calamities. The best examples are offered by the life of Christ, who prayed for his murderers, and the witness of the proto-martyr Stephen.

#### 3. Reconciliation with Oneself and with One's Neighbor

"...do not let your brother go to bed irritated with you, and do not yourself go to

bed irritated with your brother<sup>57</sup>. Maximus sees even negative experiences as beneficial. Even when insulted by others we should keep our hearts free from hatred. If not, we shall be cut off from love. Then he suggests a good way forward. We have to consider these negative experiences as beneficial. For E.g. When we suffer indignity self-esteem is driven out.

#### 4. Faith's Need for Love

Faith without love does not actualize the light of spiritual knowledge in the soul, just as the thought of fire does not warm the body.<sup>58</sup> Faith needs to attain love.

#### 5. A Pure Intellect

Just as the light of the Sun attracts a healthy eye, knowledge of God through love, naturally draws the pure intellect to itself<sup>59</sup>. A Pure intellect is divorced from ignorance and illumined by divine light<sup>60</sup>.

#### 6. A Pure Soul

Pure soul is the seat of the love of God. From the characteristics of its state one recognises that a pure soul is:

- freed from passions : the soul is in peace
- constantly delighted by divine love<sup>61</sup>
- not easily moved to evil<sup>62</sup>

<sup>53</sup> *De Car.* I.61.

<sup>54</sup> *De Car.* I.61.

<sup>55</sup> *De Car.* I.62.

<sup>56</sup> *De Car.* I.37.

<sup>57</sup> *De Car.* I.53.

<sup>58</sup> *De Car.* I. 31.

<sup>59</sup> *De Car.* I. 32.

<sup>60</sup> *De Car.* I. 33.

<sup>61</sup> *De Car.* I. 34.

<sup>62</sup> *De Car.* I. 36.

### 3.5 The Role of the Intellect in the Achievement of Pure Love

The intellect when joined to God for long periods through prayer and love, becomes wise, good, powerful, compassionate, merciful and capable of long suffering. It achieves all the divine qualities. But when the intellect is attached to material things it becomes self-indulgent like some domestic animal, or fights like a wild beast for the material goods described as 'the world' in the scripture<sup>63</sup>. Self-control, love, psalmody and prayer help men to free his intellect from these material things.<sup>64</sup> At the moment of death, his body separates itself from the things of this world. The intellect should die similarly and separate itself from conceptual images of this world. If it does not undergo such a death, it cannot be with God and live with God.<sup>65</sup>

The effort to achieve this kind of death is a spiritual battle. During the course of this battle God allows us to be assailed by demons. This is for five main reasons:

1. By attacking and counterattacking we learn to discriminate between virtue and vice
2. Acquiring virtue through conflict and toil helps us to preserve it more securely and permanently.
3. When making progress in virtue, in this way we do not become haughty but learn humility

4. Through gaining some experience of evil, we learn to hate it with perfect hatred
5. Achieving dispassionateness in this way, we do not forget either our weakness or the power of Him who helped us<sup>66</sup>.

The love for God will help us to bear the pain of this battle<sup>67</sup>. Through genuine love of God we can drive out the passions. Love for God will prompt us to choose Him rather than the world, and the soul rather than the flesh. The person who really loves God despises the things of this world and devotes himself constantly to God through self-control, love, prayer, psalmody and so on<sup>68</sup>.

### 3.6 Passions: The Greatest Impediment to the Achievement of Love

When the intellect is attached to material things, passions are aroused. When the passions dominate the intellect it is separated from God. In addition to Evagrius' eight principal passions, Maximus considers others such as resentment, envy etc.<sup>69</sup>.

#### 3.6.1 Self-Love: The Mother of Passions

Self love-the passion of attachment to one's own body-is the mother of all the passions. From it derives three principal desires: gluttony, avarice and self esteem. Gluttony gives birth to unchastity, avarice to greed and self esteem to pride. Anyone who with the help of God expels the mother

<sup>63</sup> *De Car.* II.53.

<sup>64</sup> *De Car.* II.54.

<sup>65</sup> *De Car.* II.62.

<sup>66</sup> *De Car.* II.67.

<sup>67</sup> *De Car.* III.10.

<sup>68</sup> *De Car.* III.50.

<sup>69</sup> *De Car.* III. 90.

LOUTH Andrew, *Maximus the Confessor* 38.



passions also rids himself of the other passions such as anger, irritability, rancor etc. But someone dominated by self love is also overpowered by all the other passions<sup>70</sup>. For Maximus the love of God is present only in those who have eliminated every trace of self-love<sup>71</sup>.

### 3.6.2 Love: The Remedy for Overcoming the Passions

Maximus presents love as the healing power for overcoming the passions. The love for the brethren (*Philadelphia*) is an important sign showing that we are beginning to free ourselves from self-love.<sup>72</sup> The acid test of the purity of love is love of our enemies<sup>73</sup>.

According to him passions are of two kinds, those that pertain to the body and those that pertain to the soul.

...some passions pertain to the body and others to the soul. The first are occasioned by the body, the second by external objects. Love and self control overcome both kinds, the first curbing the passions of the soul and second those of the body. Some passions pertain to the soul's incensive power and

others to its desiring aspect. Both kinds are aroused through the senses. They are aroused when soul lacks love and self-control. The passions of the soul's incensive power are more difficult to combat than those of its desiring aspect. Consequently our Lord has given a stronger remedy against them: the commandment of love.<sup>74</sup> ...Humility and ascetic hardship free a man from all sins, for the one cuts out the passions of the soul, the other those of the body.<sup>75</sup>

When love of God dominates the intellect, it helps the intellect to rise above not only sensible things but even this transitory life<sup>76</sup>. The observance of the commandments helps us to be free from the passions. Spiritual reading and contemplation detach the intellect from form and matter and lead us to undistracted prayer, which is the expression of true love for God.<sup>77</sup> He who loves God cultivates pure prayer, driving out every passion that prevents him from prayer.<sup>78</sup>

### 3.6.3 The Nature of State of Dispassionateness (*Apatheia*)

One, who reaches the perfection of love, also attains the summit of dispassionateness.

<sup>70</sup> *De Car.* III. 56-57

<sup>71</sup> SPIDLIK Thomas, *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, Michigan-Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications Inc., 1996, 300.

<sup>72</sup> *De Car.* I. 61.

LOUTH Andrew, *Maximus the Confessor* 39.

<sup>73</sup> LOUTH Andrew, *Maximus the Confessor* 39.

<sup>74</sup> *De Car.* I. 65-66.

<sup>75</sup> *De Car.* I. 76.

<sup>76</sup> *De Car.* II.3

<sup>77</sup> *De Car.* II.1, 4

<sup>78</sup> *De Car.* II.7

Then there is no difference between himself and another, Christians and unbelievers, slave and free or even between male and female. He can fix his attention on the nature of man in its singleness. He considers all equally. For him there is only Christ, who 'is all, and in all' (Col.3:11).<sup>79</sup>

### 3.6.4 The Need for The Blessed Passion of Holy Love

In his Centuries Maximus speaks of the need for the blessed passion of Holy love<sup>80</sup> [tou makariou paqouz thz agiaz agaphz] that binds the intellect to spiritual realities. Holy Love is 'the passion', not a state of disinterestedness. As hot soup keeps insects away, so the heat of pure love in the heart keeps away the bodily passions. The heart is not in a state of vacuum, but enjoys the fullness of love. A distinction should be made between the blameworthy passion of love that makes the mind absorbed in material things, and the praiseworthy passion of love that binds it to divine things<sup>81</sup>. When we examine closely Maximus' teaching on *apatheia*, we understand that he is aware of the danger of an *apatheia* which is merely disinterestedness.

For him *apatheia* must be a state of purified love. He defines passion as... an impulse of the soul contrary to nature.<sup>82</sup> Here he differs from Evagrius. Evagrius considers *apatheia* as the destruction of the passions while for Maximus it is their transformation<sup>83</sup>. That means only the passions that are contrary to nature should be expelled, while the other natural passions are perfectly proper. For Maximus *apatheia* is the restoration of what is natural.<sup>84</sup>

If a man has rid himself of the passions and so freed his thoughts from them, it does not necessarily mean that his thoughts are already oriented towards the Divine. It may be that he feels no passionate attraction either for human or for divine things.<sup>85</sup> That is why he needs the blessed passion of holy love, which binds the intellect to spiritual contemplation and persuades it to prefer what is immaterial, intelligible and divine, to what is apprehended by the senses.<sup>86</sup> Some men abstain from the passions because of human fear, others because of self-esteem, and others through self control. Some however, are delivered from the passions by divine providence.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>79</sup> *De Car.* II.30

<sup>80</sup> *De Car.* III.67.

<sup>81</sup> *De Car.* III.71.

COOPER G. Adam, *The Body in St. Maximus the Confessor. Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2005, 237.

<sup>82</sup> *De Car.* II.16.

<sup>83</sup> LOUTH Andrew, "Maximus the Confessor", in Jones Cheslyn (et.al) *The Study of Spirituality*, New York-Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986, 190-198, 193.

<sup>84</sup> LOUTH Andrew, *Maximus the Confessor* 41.

<sup>85</sup> *De Car.* III.68.

<sup>86</sup> *De Car.* III.67.

<sup>87</sup> *De Car.* II.23.

## 4 Conclusion

Love is God Himself. Since God is beyond all categories of measurement and definition, love also stands at the same level in our comprehension. Just as God can be experienced with a pure heart, love can only be experienced not defined perfectly. Maximus the Confessor is aware of this great truth and concludes the *Centuriae de Caritate* with this great vision. Only God can reveal and teach us what is love.

Many have said much about love, but you will find love itself only if you seek it among the disciples of Christ. For only they have true Love as love's teacher. 'Though I have the gift of prophecy', says St Paul, 'and know all mysteries and all knowledge . . . and have no love, it profits me nothing' (1 Cor. 13:2-3). He who possesses love possesses God Himself, for 'God is love' (1 John 4:8). To Him be glory throughout the ages. Amen.<sup>88</sup>



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<sup>88</sup> *De Car.* IV.100.



# Book Review -1

MEKKATTUKUNNEL Andrews(ed.), *Mar Thoma Margam: the Ecclesial Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians*, Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India Publications (OIRSI), No. 355, Vadavathoor, 2011.

Kerala has been described as the cradle of Christianity in India. The pre-colonial history of this southern Indian State available in oral traditions, ancient songs, antique inscriptions on rock and copper plates throw light on the origin and cultural heritage of the St. Thomas Christians in Kerala. The expression *MarThoma Margam* denotes the Sacred Tradition as well as the cultural identity of this Christian community. The book *Mar Thoma Margam: the Ecclesial Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians* published in connection with the Golden Jubilee celebrations of Saint Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Kottayam is a diligent attempt to proclaim the theological identity of the Syro-Malabar Church which is numerically the second largest oriental Church after the Ukrainian Church. The book is an intellectual attempt to proclaim the distinctiveness of the Syro-Malabar ecclesial community and an invitation to re-experience the sources of St. Thomas Christian existence. The venture is indeed opportune while the above community, living in a diversified cultural milieu sometimes runs the risk of undergoing an identity crisis.

Starting with a general introduction which reveals the manifold implications of the

expression *Mar Thoma Margam*, the volume is organized into five sections comprising, respectively, of essays on Theology, Liturgy, Spirituality & Culture, Moral life and Ecclesial discipline of the Syro-Malabar Christians.

The Christ experience of the Apostle Thomas is the basis of the St. Thomas Christian heritage. Otherwise stated, the Way of Thomas (*Mar Thoma Margam*) owes its very existence to the Christ experience of the Apostle. The first section of the volume rightly opens with an attempt to probe the unique character of the faith confession of Saint Thomas the Apostle. The section then aims at situating the theological identity of the Saint Thomas Christians and presents valuable studies on their Judeo-Christian and Patristic roots, their Basic Christological perspectives, the role of the Holy Spirit in their theological reflections, their ecclesiological orientations. Further, this section explores the missiological and ecumenical endeavors of this community.

Though the Syro-Malabar Christians were considerably latinized in the course of time, still they are keen in preserving, to some extent, their original East Syriac liturgy in its essentials. Consequently, the second section of the book aptly focuses on the sources and the general characteristics of the liturgy of the Saint Thomas Christians. The section equally highlights the theology of the East Syrian Anaphoras (of Addai-Mari, of Nestorius and of Theodore of Mopsuestia). The liturgical year of the East

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Syrian Churches, their celebration of the liturgical feasts. The East Syriac Liturgy of the Hours and the East Syrian liturgical poetry are also theologically explored.

A liturgical reform has always room for pastoral adaptations. For the saint Thomas Christians, adaption in liturgy does not mean diverting from all they had received for centuries, but following the footsteps of their forefathers who were “Christians in Faith, East Syrian in liturgy and Indian in culture”. The third section of the present volume unveils this religio-cultural conviction of the Syro-Malabar Christians and their contributions to the common cultural heritage of India. This section of *Mar Thoma Margam* has not missed areas like the ascetical practices of the Saint Thomas Christians, the monasticism in East Syrian Churches, faith formation in the Syro-Malabar Church and the contributions of Thomas Christians to Syriac and Malayalam languages.

Liturgical-sacramental discourses could never be detached from moral praxis: proclamation of Christian belief, practice of the faithful, and their active moral life are to be existed as one integrated whole. This principle of *Lex oranti, lex vivendi* is the connecting thread of the 4<sup>th</sup> section of the book. Embracing the wisdom and riches of Eastern theological tradition, authors attempt to articulate the intimate link between religious life, theological reflections and moral life of the St. Thomas Christian community.

The book takes a historico-canonical turn in its final section: a good number of essays here invite the readers to discover the ecclesial discipline of the Church of Saint Thomas. The particular laws of this Church is an outcome of the historical evolution of the Law of Thomas (*Thomayude Niyamam*) shaped more or less by the apostolic teaching and the socio-religious situation of India. Some of the essays are historical and trace the development of Syro-Malabar Church as a *sui Iuris* Church. The volume appropriately concludes with a historical reflection on the *raison d'être* of the St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary, by one of its founding fathers Mar Joseph Pallikaparampil.

Rev. Dr. Andrews Mekkattukunnel and his editorial team of experts – Dr. James Palackal, Dr. Pauly Maniattu, Dr. Jose Puthiaparampil, Dr. Dominic Vechoor and Dr. James Thalachellor – initiate the readers to explore the spiritual richness of the apostolic tradition of the Syro-Malabar Church. The editors of this monumental work deserve due appreciation in their commitment to present and preserve the traditions of the mother Church. The authenticity of this project is further perceptible from the list of names of scholars who contributed the outcomes of their researches. The quality of their essays is high and the volume is a welcome compliment to several researches already achieved in Eastern theological reflections. Let us hope that it would provide valuable stimulus to undertake new researches on the “Christo-ecclesio-centric” life of the Syro-Malabar community.



## Book Review - 2

Abraham Ayckara & Jose Palakeel, *The Our Father Rosary: A Universal Prayer of Christian Inspiration*, Claretian Publications, Bangalore, 2012, pp.62, Price. Rs. 40.00.

This small book on 'Our Father Rosary' authored by Fr Abraham Ayckara and Fr Jose Palakeel, two priests of the Missionary Society of St. Thomas, introduces us to a new form of Rosary addressed to God the Father. This relatively new devotion follows the pattern of the Marian Rosary, the most popular Christian devotion. This handbook of prayer has just a few pages of theological introduction to the 'Our Father Rosary'. The rest of the book is the prayer of the rosary as such. After giving us a very brief introduction to the historical view of the 'Our Father Rosary', the essential feature of this Rosary is explained. An explanation of the Lord's Prayer given in the book seems quite fitting because the major portion of the Rosary consists of the Lord's Prayer. The authors deal with the ecumenical and interreligious significance of the Lord's Prayer.

The authors give us a short introduction to the three categories of mysteries, namely, the mysteries of creation, the mysteries of redemption and the mysteries of sanctification. It commemorates the entire history of salvation. The mysteries start with creation and end with the last judgement and the final manifestation of the reign of God. Before presenting the mysteries, the text of the Lord's

Prayer from Mt 6, 9-13 is given. The five mysteries of the creation are the following: the creation of the universe, the creation of humans, human sin and God's promise of a savior, election of Israel as the People of God and the God of love and compassion. The five mysteries of redemption are the birth of the savior in a manger, the inauguration of the reign of God, the institution of the Eucharist, the passion and death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus. The five mysteries of sanctification are the following: the universal divine daughter/sonship, the Christian divine daughter/sonship, the spirit of charity and truth, the spirit of unity of the human kind and the final manifestation of the reign of God.

The distant origin of the 'Our Father Rosary' may be found in the practice of the lay brothers in the ancient monasteries praying the Our Father repetitively 50 or 150 times, as a means of prayer and contemplation. It is quite natural that those brothers who were unable to recite the Divine Office in Latin started praying the Our Father many times as a substitute for the Divine Office. *Pater noster beads* used then for counting the Our Father later evolved into the present Rosary. Our Father Rosary is a repetitive prayer, where decades of Our Father is repeated, while contemplating a key event (mystery) from the Bible. 'Our Father Rosary' has 3 sets of 5 mysteries each, enabling the contemplation of the salvific action of God as Creation,

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Redemption and Sanctification, traditionally considered as action of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The book outlines the theology of the prayer and contains the prayers with suitable illustrations of each main theme or mystery.

The Our Father, the unique prayer taught by Jesus himself, is a beautiful prayer which proclaims the universal parenthood of God and fraternity of all human beings. Jesus taught this prayer to his disciples, at their request. The authors follow the Latin liturgical form of the Lord's Prayer, retaining the expression "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." The Oriental liturgical traditions prefer the expression "forgive us our debts and sins as we also have forgiven our debtors". The Pshitta Syriac version and the English versions including the RSV Catholic Edition, New International Version, New Living Translation, and the New American Standard Bible follow the expression preferred by the Oriental liturgies. The verses that

immediately follow the Lord's Prayer in the Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 6, 14-15) point to the importance of forgiveness, presenting it as a *sine qua non* condition for the forgiveness of our sins. Hence it would have been better to maintain the expression preferred by the liturgical texts of the Oriental Churches including the Syro-Malabar liturgy, retaining the true challenge of the forgiving love.

The authors promote the devotion of 'Our Father Rosary' with the firm conviction that the 'Our Father Rosary' has the wonderful power of transforming us. In the words of Fr. Abraham Ayckara, one of the authors of this book, the Christian vision of God as a loving Father provides an effective spiritual resource for the creation of an authentic world family of all humans, irrespective of caste, creed and cult. 'Our Father' is a prayer for the coming of the reign of God, which refers to a state of harmony, peace and prosperity.

Fr Pauly Maniyattu

# News

## **The 82<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary of the Re-union of Malankara Suriyano Catholic Church**

The 82<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary of the Re-union of Syro-Malankara Church was conducted at Pathanamthitta, Kerala. The Patriarch of Maronite Syrian Catholic Church Moran Mar Bechara Boutros Al Rai visited Kerala 19-23 September in connection with the ceremonies. He visited St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor, Kottayam and St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute Kottayam on 22<sup>nd</sup>.

## **Two New Bishops for the Syro-Malabar Church**

**Mar George Rajendran Kuttinadar** is the new Bishop of the Eparchy of Thuckalay in Tamil Nadu. The Episcopal consecration was held on 16<sup>th</sup> September at Sacred Heart Forane Church, Padanthalumoodu in Tamil Nadu.

**Mar Jacob Muricken** is appointed as the Auxiliary Bishop of the Eparchy of Palai. The consecration ceremony is on 1<sup>st</sup> October at St. Thomas Cathedral, Pala.

## **Sacerdotal Golden Jubilee of His Grace Mar Joseph Powathil.**

In connection with the Sacerdotal Golden Jubilee and the Ruby Jubilee of Episcopal Consecration of His Grace Powathil Mar Joseph Metropolitan Archbishop Emeritus of Changanacherry,

who is a preserver of the Oriental ethos, an ardent promoter of ecumenism and inter-religious harmony and the Champion of the Minority rights and social justice, three Symposia were conducted at three different places in Kerala.

Pastoral Orientation Centre, Palarivattom, Kochi was the venue of the first Symposium on "Inter-Church relationships and Inter-Religious Harmony on 14<sup>th</sup> July. Second Symposium was on 18<sup>th</sup> July at Lourdes Forane Church, Thiruvananthapuram on "Education and Ministry Rights". Assumption College, Changanassery, Kottayam hosted the 3<sup>rd</sup> Symposium on 11<sup>th</sup> August. "Revitalization of Syro-Malabar Church in its ecclesiological and Liturgical Identity" was the theme discussed.

## **13<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of Bishop's Synod at Vatican**

Syro Malabar Major Archbishop Mar George Alencherry, Syro-Malankara Major Archbishop Mar Baseliose Climis Catholica Bava, Mar Joseph Kallarangattu, Rt. Rev. Dr. Stanley Roman are the Bishops taking part in the Synod from Kerala. Cardinal Dr. Oswald Gracious and C.M.I. Prior General Fr. Joseph Panthaplamthottiyil are nominated by Pope Benedict XVI from India. Shri. Manoj Sunny, Fr. Thomas Manjaly and Sr. Rekha Chennattu are also participating in the Synod.



## A New Study on Gabriel Qatraya's Commentary on Qurbana

A doctoral dissertation on the 7<sup>th</sup> century East Syriac commentator Gabriel Qatraya's commentary on Qurbana was defended at Paurastyavidyapitham, Vadavathoor, Kottayam. This doctoral dissertation with the title "*Structure and Theology of East Syriac Qurbânâ According to Gabriel Qatraya: A Liturgical and Theological Analysis of Gabriel Qatraya's Commentary on the Office of the Mysteries*" is the first scientific detailed study on the commentary of Qatraya from liturgical and theological perspectives. One of the most important features of this dissertation written by Sr. Jean Mathew S.H. under the direction of Fr. Pauly Maniyattu is the new English translation of Qatraya's Syriac commentary on the Eucharist found in the 13<sup>th</sup> century manuscript Or 3336 preserved in the British Museum.

The dissertation consists of a thorough analysis of the structure and theology of the East Syriac Qurbana based on the

commentary of Qatraya. The author makes a systematic comparison of the structure of the Qurbana according to Qatraya with the structures of the Qurbana according to the commentaries of other East Syriac commentators and sometimes even with the commentaries of West Syriac and Byzantine authors. The dissertation also contains a theological analysis of the various elements in the Qurbana commented by Qatraya. This theological analysis serves as a basis for the development of important theological themes in another chapter. This critical study on the commentary of Qatraya is indeed a significant contribution to the liturgical theology of the East Syriac tradition in general, and to that of the Syro-Malabar Church in particular. The dissertation was defended at Paurasty Vidyaipitham on 14 August 2012. Dr. Thomas Mannoorampampil and Dr. Andrews Mekkattukunnel were the first and second readers of the dissertation respectively.

